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Introduction

The truth has lately been / Welsh and smoke-laden and endlessly local

(J.H. Prynne, 'A New Tax on the Counter-earth', 1971)

Devolution has had a clear impact on contemporary literary production in Wales. To ascertain the specific ways in which literature has been affected by the discourse of devolution, requires an interdisciplinary approach, one that takes into account the ways in which literature can be affected by a complex and still unfolding political event.ⁱ While a political scientist might be able to explore a counterfactual approach to devolution, that is, what might have happened were the referendum, held on 18 September 1997, to have returned a different result, literary criticism has no such comparable recourse. As such, any attempt to identify or extricate which of the observable changes in literature in Wales might not have occurred were the 1997 devolution referendum to have returned a different result is problematic.ⁱⁱ So, while it might be interesting to discuss what *might have been* were the referendum to have returned a different result, this thesis will attempt to focus on the specific changes that have occurred both as a direct consequence of devolution, such as structural changes to the funding and marketing of Welsh literature, as well as more indirect

ⁱ See 'The history of Welsh devolution', National Assembly for Wales [website] <<http://www.assembly.wales/en/abthome/role-of-assembly-how-it-works/Pages/history-welsh-devolution.aspx>>

ⁱⁱ Literature might function as a discourse that can explore counterfactual and alternate histories, such as in Jan Morris's *Machynlleth Triad* (discussed in chapter one, which imagines a future independent Welsh state that is the consequence of a successful Glyndŵr revolution). Jan Morris and Twm Morys, *A Machynlleth Triad* (London: Penguin, 1995). For an overview of counterfactuals in the novel, see Richard J. Evans, *Altered Pasts: Counterfactuals in History* (London: Abacus, 2014). The chapter 'Future Fictions', deals exclusively with counterfactuals in fiction, including the most notable Welsh example, Owen Sheers's *Resistance* (London: Faber and Faber, 2007), pp. 91-130.

consequences, such as changes to the way in which contemporary Welsh writing in English is discussed in literary criticism (and is also reflective of more general critical trends). It will also present an analysis of post-devolution Welsh writing in English that emphasises the representation (and confluence) of real, diasporic, and fictional Welsh spaces, and encompass a broad range of writers operating within Wales and beyond its borders.

However, in order to discuss any observable changes to Welsh spaces, and their various literary representations, this thesis will begin with a discussion of the work of two writers whose careers had begun significantly prior to devolution, and whose engagement with Welsh political, geographical, and cultural spaces varies significantly. These writers, Jan Morris and Iain Sinclair, present radically different visions of pre- and post-devolution Welsh spaces. However, just as the discourse of devolution didn't begin with the 1997 referendum, the writing of devolutionary texts (or texts that explore themes pertinent to devolution or independence), was well underway prior to 1997. The writing that has been published in post-devolution Wales, then, should not be discussed only as a product of a new political paradigm (or the formation of a literary resistance to it), but also as a product of the emergence of that much-contested category, previously known as Anglo-Welsh literature, but now referred to as Welsh writing in English. So, it is the discourse of devolution, as well as its material effects, which is of pertinence to this thesis.

This thesis will thus comprise six chapters, in two complementary parts arranged in a broad pre/post-devolution chronology of Welsh writing in English. Part One will introduce the literary geographical framework for the thesis, and is divided into three chapters. The first will present an overview of critical and recent developments in the field of literary

geography. The second will discuss the writing of Jan Morris as outlying representative of a conservative utopianist trend in Welsh writing, and the way in which she imaginatively constructs visions of devolution and Welsh independence in her fiction. The third will discuss Iain Sinclair (a Welsh-born writer infrequently associated with Wales), as an altogether more sceptical presence: a representative of a psychogeographical resistance to Morris's nationalist (even boosterist) writing. The Sinclair chapter will also explore the role that both the media and literary criticism play in reflecting contemporary discussions of Welshness (and the compatibility of 'exiled' figures within such a debate). This chapter will also discuss the relative ambivalence in the work of Welsh writers such as Sinclair towards the project of devolution. The Morris and Sinclair chapters will provide a close reading of how specific geographies are represented in their literature, from the perspective of an 'exile', and an 'electively' Welsh writer. Part Two will also comprise three chapters, the first of which will provide a detailed analysis of devolution in Wales, both in a political and cultural sense. Chapters four and five are synoptic in their approach, and focus on two series from the Bridgend-based publisher Seren. Both series cover a wide range of urban and rural spaces both within Wales's geographical borders and beyond. Chapter five will focus on Seren's contemporary series of retellings of tales from the *Mabinogion*, in the context of some twentieth-century forebears and the notion of 'Celticity' in a devolved Wales. It will also discuss some of the most notable changes to the literary funding landscape in Wales (Seren's *New Stories from the Mabinogion* received significant funding from the Welsh Books Council, and arguably would not have been published without devolution). Chapter six, which focuses on the *Real* series, discusses how a series of post-devolution travel guides (covering locations in Wales and England) represent devolved Welsh space (as well as those areas that are seemingly unaffected by devolution). Put

simply, the *Real* series was instigated by the advent of devolution and the changing Welsh political and cultural landscape, and as such is of great cultural importance to the post-devolution Welsh literary landscape. This chapter will analyse and develop upon recent work conducted in the field of cultural and literary geography, and will also involve a discussion of psychogeography in Wales.

Across both Part One and Part Two, this thesis will emphasise some common threads that connect what is a fairly disparate collection of writers, providing an argument for a specifically Welsh strand of psychogeographical writing (extending back to the gothic writer Arthur Machen), and making the case for a broader integration of psychogeography into the post-devolution literature debate. Such a line of enquiry also necessitates an investigation into the way in which post-devolution literature is *de facto* resistant to broad geographical categorisations of Welsh spaces (north/south, rural/industrial, Cymraeg/Anglophone), or whether it is in fact more emblematic of wider literary trends in psychogeographical writing.

The choice of these disparate writers (who have not been discussed either in the context of devolution or one another in any previous critical work), is to provide a broad cross-section of Welsh writing in English, with lesser known works and series (that generate almost no prolonged discussion in criticism outside of Wales) discussed alongside more established figures with international reputations. Not only will this reveal the ways in which engrained narratives about parochial and internationalist writing are largely based upon factors that lie beyond the writing itself, but also that the literary geographical framework of this research is merited because it challenges such notions of parochialism (or localism), revealing as it

does the connectedness of disparate geographical spaces, both in Wales and beyond its borders.

It is also worth noting that this thesis is rooted in a discussion of Anglophone literature in Wales. A fully bilingual discussion of post-devolution literature in Wales would no doubt be a valuable one (and may yet indicate a way in which this kind of research may develop in the future). As yet, no such research has been published in English. However, there is continuing interest in the field of post-devolution Welsh-language writing. For example, Robin Chapman has said the following of Welsh-language fiction since the late 1990s:

When we want to talk of the politicisation of Welsh-language literature since the 1990s, we need to make a counter-intuitive leap. Because on the face of it, literature in Welsh has become determinedly depoliticised – or more precisely, apolitical since the mid-1990s. In part, no doubt, the creation of a Welsh Government in 1999 has played a role in the emergence of a more assured idiom; but change has occurred through intrinsic factors too. After forty years of agonising over the death of the language, rural unemployment and depopulation, the proliferation of second homes and the perceived brutalities of the free market, Wales in the new millennium lost patience with nobility, and developed an eagerness to re-imagine itself as somewhere less frantic and more playful.ⁱⁱⁱ

ⁱⁱⁱ Robin Chapman, 'Podcast: Contemporary Literature from Wales', *New Welsh Review* 15 (2017), <<http://www.newwelshreview.com/article.php?id=1403>>

This less-overtly politicised trend in Welsh-language fiction may well run counter to post-devolution Anglophone literature in Wales. The texts featured in this thesis discuss contemporary Welsh politics to varying extents, and it would be incorrect to suggest that monolingual, Anglophone writers in Wales had not agonised over the ‘death of the Welsh language’, or even the ‘proliferation of second homes’ (which didn’t only impact Welsh-speaking populations). As Chapman succinctly states in a sentiment that is perhaps as true of Welsh-language writing in Wales as it is of Anglophone Welsh writing, changes in literature have also ‘occurred through intrinsic factors’. As such, while both Anglophone and Cymraeg writing in Wales have undoubtedly been impacted by some of the same ‘intrinsic factors’, this work will focus on some of the ways in which Anglophone writing has been uniquely shaped by the discourse (and effects) of devolution.

Part One: Resistant and Conservative Welsh Spaces

Chapter One: Mapping the 'Real': The Spatial Turn, and Psychogeography in Wales

A critical approach to devolution and Welsh writing cannot assume a causal relationship between society (social space) and the literature it generates. This thesis will instead focus on a discussion of the way in which literature reflects both real and imagined Welsh geographies, and how these spaces are in dialogue with the continuing process of devolution. While Cardiff Bay, the new governmental centre of Wales, is perhaps the most obvious example of a Welsh space that has been redefined by devolution (even if the majority of its residents were resistant to the idea of devolution), there are several other examples of areas that bear the imprint of devolution. Several areas have received significant funding for redevelopment, some of which will be discussed in this thesis, and this changing geographical landscape requires critical attention when discussing literary trends.

The interdisciplinary approach that this thesis will take towards contemporary Anglophone literature in Wales is that of literary geography, described by Neal Alexander as 'an emergent interdisciplinary field of research situated at the interface between human geography and literary studies.'¹ There is no particular ideology that unites the authors discussed, and as such this discussion will focus on the way in which Welsh and non-Welsh

¹ Neal Alexander, 'On Literary Geography', *Literary Geographies* 1.1 (2015), pp. 3-6, 3. Alexander also discusses the genesis of the term 'literary geography' and its most recent manifestations in the work of Franco Moretti, Andrew Thacker, and Sheila Hones (all of whom will be discussed in this introduction).

geographies are rendered in contemporary Anglophone Welsh literature. The authors range from those who have publicly advocated and campaigned for devolution, and even stood as candidates for the UK Parliament; to those who (for a variety of reasons) are either opposed to or deeply cynical about devolution, as well as those who avoid aligning their work with any overt politics or even Welsh identity/nationality. They also include writers who are decidedly more ambivalent, having not professed any particularly strong opinions either for or against devolution. There are those who, living outside of Wales, could not take part in the referendum itself. In lieu of a unifying, definite political stance, the discussion that follows will emphasise the geographical orientation of the pieces discussed; the way in which literature in Wales engages with geography and can transform or reinforce topographical orthodoxies that might, in turn, be complicated by a regional or national identities.

The Spatial Turn

In his essay 'Of Other Spaces' (1984), Michel Foucault highlights a fundamental shift in the humanities towards the latter half of the twentieth century; a spatial turn that engendered a theoretical departure from the 'great obsession of the nineteenth century [which] was, as we know, history':²

In any case I believe that the anxiety of our era has to do fundamentally with space, no doubt a great deal more than with time. Time probably appears to us only as one

² Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', trans. Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (Spring, 1986), 22-27, p. 22.

of the various distributive operations that are possible for the elements that are spread out in space.³

Foucault's credo is *itself* reminiscent of another by an integral figure of the spatial turn of the late twentieth century, Fredric Jameson, who wrote in his influential work, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991):

I think it is at least empirically arguable that our daily life, our psychic experience, our cultural languages, are today dominated by categories of space, rather than time, as in the preceding period of high modernism.⁴

The spatialisation of literary and cultural studies, and its embracing of the geographical paradigms espoused by Foucault and Jameson, has been developed by recent critical activity both in 'Critical Literary Geography' and 'Geocriticism'. These still evolving and expanding modes of criticism reinforce the idea that literature of all kinds can yield – in a process that is significant, discursive, and informative – geographical 'knowledge', and that this 'knowledge' (in turn) materially affects those spaces that it represents.

Moreover, as Marc Brosseau has noted of human geography's early use of literary texts as a source of geographical knowledge in his essay 'Geography's Literature' (1994), 'there is a

³ Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p. 23.

⁴ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991), p. 16.

will to transform fictional literature into a reservoir of positive geographical data'.⁵ Brosseau, referring to this previously dominant type of literary geography, draws 'attention to [its] partial silencing of the literary text as a text', which is indicative of an approach that attempts to remove the text's 'parasitical elements'; or, those elements of a text that have the potential to obscure meaning and narrow interpretation, thus representing an obstacle to the use of literary texts as a source of geographical data.⁶ As Brosseau suggests, early geographical readings of literature were positivist, and he notes 'a great reluctance to reflect on the discursive dimension of literature, or on the text for that matter'.⁷ The problematic 'silencing' of the text has been remedied in accounts such as that of Brosseau, in which there is an observable interdisciplinary trend with an emphasis on understanding geography as not simply somehow analogous to, or as context for, literature, but as significantly entwined with literary signification and the process of writing itself.

The necessity of an interdisciplinary approach to literary geography, one that addresses the need to analyse the ways in which the text, like a map (or *as* a map), is in constitutive dialogue with the place it represents, was addressed by J.B. Harley in the late 1980s. In his critical adaptation of Derridean deconstructionist methods into the field of cartography, Harley suggests that

⁵ Marc Brosseau, 'Geography's Literature', *Progress in Human Geography*, 18.3 (1994), 333-353, p. 337

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 349 and p. 337.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 339.

[Derrida's] notion of the rhetoricity of all texts provides a provocative challenge. It demands a search for metaphor and rhetoric in maps where previous scholars had found only measurement and topography.⁸

A reader is to read a map as a text, acknowledging its *rhetoricity*; the map betrays its various layers of representation, and deconstructs itself. It is important to note here that Harley places the map within the realm of rhetoric as well as science, so as to synthesise a reading of the 'social purposes as well as the content of maps'.⁹ Thus, the traditional notion that a map is capable of representing a space or place is no longer a question of empirical understanding. For Harley, it is not a case of just *what* the map signifies, but rather of *how* it necessarily, and recursively, implicates itself in the process of signification. Harley suggests that one might analyse the map as a text that exposes its own rhetorical strategies, and also as a text with a unique discursive social *purpose*; thus he is careful to append a caveat to his reading of Derrida: 'I do not accept some of the more extreme positions attributed to Derrida. For example, it would be unacceptable for a social history of cartography to adopt the view that nothing lies outside the text'.¹⁰ In asserting that a discussion of cartography cannot be extricated from its social history, Harley suggests that the map represents a social space as well as rendering material space, and that '[m]uch of the power of the map, as a representation of social geography, is that it operates behind a mask of a seemingly neutral

⁸ J. B. Harley, 'Deconstructing the Map', in T. J. Barnes and J. S. Duncan (eds.), *Writing Worlds: Discourse, Text and Metaphor* (London: Routledge, 1992), 231–47, p. 233.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

¹⁰ J.B. Harley, *The New Nature of Maps* (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), p. 264, n. 9. It is important to note here that Harley's argument may actually be with the interpretation or translation of Derrida's position, rather than Derrida himself.

science'.¹¹ As David Harvey suggests, mapping is 'far from ideologically neutral', and is imbricated with trade and power.¹² Harvey, using the example of English colonisation of Britain, goes so far as to suggest that 'The cost of cartographic ignorance – militarily as well as in trade and commerce – was so enormous that the incentive to procure good maps overwhelmed any other reservations.'¹³ Doreen Massey argues that by recognising the map's deficiencies as a 'two-dimensional' representation of space, 'feminist and postcolonial reimaginings of the possibilities of cartography [...] [push] further the critique of maps as "technologies of power" to lever open our understanding of the map itself.'¹⁴

Harley's discussion of the map as a text opens up an inclusive dialogue which permits greater permeability between the discourses of geography and literature, and recognises social context (the 'outside of the text') as an important, but not delimiting factor. The map, therefore, like a literary text, presents a reader with multiple layers of signification and resists singular interpretation.

In *The Production of Space* (1991), Henri Lefebvre suggests that the geographical analysis of literature is not reducible to an oppositional binary between two academic fields, positing a 'perceived – conceived – lived triad', within which he refers to 'spatial practice, representations of space, [and] representational spaces'.¹⁵ Lefebvre's triad emphasises that

¹¹ Ibid., p. 158.

¹² David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), p. 228.

¹³ Ibid., p. 228.

¹⁴ Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage, 2012), p. 110.

¹⁵ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), p. 40. It should be noted that Lefebvre's book is not specifically addressing

space should not be conceptualised as a binary opposition of perception and representation, which encourages ‘oppositions, contrasts [and] antagonisms’, but instead as a more complex structure, the constituent parts of which are in a state of flux.¹⁶ Representations of place – both cartographic and literary – share a system of syntactical and grammatical signs that purport to represent a truth or narrative, but the visibility of these techniques varies; as Harley suggests, the map’s deeper signification is hidden behind, and often obscured by, its scientific semantic coding. It could be suggested that modes of literary and cartographical representation encounter the similar issues associated with encoding a reality that is, in terms coined by Jean Baudrillard, ‘hyperreal’.¹⁷ While Harley and others have deconstructed the positivist fiction of maps, the dialogic relationship between geography and literature can be seen to further implicate by proxy similarly ‘positivist’ literary genres, such as the travel guide, a frequent close companion of the map. However, as Brosseau suggests, attempting merely to abstract positive geographical data from a literary text is misguided (echoing Harley’s suggestion that one cannot *only* abstract geographical data from a map). In acknowledging ‘the rhetoricity of all texts’, any attempt to derive a singular, static meaning from a literary text or map involves itself in a hegemonic, unilateral process of textual interpretation. Recent advances in geographical literary criticism have engendered a paradigmatic shift, in which cartographical and literary readings are no longer merely analogous to one another. As Damian Walford Davies writes in the opening to his recent volume *Cartographies of Culture* (2012), the border between

literary geography, but is nonetheless crucial to an understanding of the social production of space.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 39.

¹⁷ Jean Baudrillard, ‘Simulacra and Simulations’, in *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*, Mark Poster ed. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988), 166-184, p. 167. Lefebvre would be suspicious of a concept such as the disappearance of the real, but the [re]production of space is common to both ideas.

text and map is historically less clear than it appears, '[t]hus, with the *carta* of this opening page unfolded, the distinction between text and map already erased, you are reading cartographically'.¹⁸ Contemporary literary geographies reflect this erosion of deterministic borders.

Geocriticism and Critical Literary Geography

The emergence of the fields of critical literary geography and geocriticism is evidence of the contemporary critical attention devoted to analysing representations of space in literature. These fields, while rooted perhaps in different traditions of literary geography, both acknowledge the arbitrariness of attempting to represent and analyse space from a single 'true' perspective.¹⁹ The parallel developments in the fields of literary geography and geocriticism appear to occur almost in isolation from one another, although both fields arose either in conjunction with or following the spatial turn in the humanities in the late-twentieth century. Bertrand Westphal's influential work throughout the 1990s remains untranslated from the original French; his most recent volume on geocriticism is the only of his book-length works to appear in English. The issue of translation is perhaps a reason for the two fields' lack of direct interaction, as methodologically there are many similarities.

Robert T. Tally, translator of Westphal's *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces* (2011), describes the practice of geocriticism as follows:

¹⁸ Damian Walford Davies, *Cartographies of Culture: New Geographies of Welsh Writing in English* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2012), p. 1.

¹⁹ Bertrand Westphal's *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces*, trans. Robert T. Tally Jr. (Palgrave Macmillan: New York, 2011).

[Westphal uses] classical myth, modern fiction, historical works, tourist brochures [...] to form a pluralistic image of the place. After all, a *place* is only a place because of the ways in which we, individually and collectively, organise space in such a way as to mark the topos as special... Our understanding of a particular place is determined by our personal experiences with it, but also by our reading about others' experiences, by our point of view, including our biases and our wishful thinking.²⁰

Westphal analyses fictions and non-fictions in order 'to form a pluralistic image of the place', giving precedence to its textual, rather than overtly (visually) cartographical, renderings.²¹ Defining and analysing place, for Westphal, is an intertextual process; one that necessitates a pluralistic and interdisciplinary approach that encompasses Westphal's methods above. A geocritical reading attempts to subvert authorial and readerly bias through 'multifocalization' (described by Westphal as 'a network of views'), destabilising the rhetoric of a particular form by pluralising it within a larger field of texts located in a particular *topos*.²² The geographical analysis of contemporary Welsh literature in this thesis will also necessarily place certain works (that cover similar territories) in contention with one another. For example, the descriptions of 'real' places in tourist brochures or guide books naturally contextualise (and challenge) fictional representations of the same space.

²⁰ Ibid., p. x.

²¹ Although the 'tourist brochures' cited more than likely contain some, perhaps small, maps.

²² *Geocriticism*, p. 129-130.

Andrew Thacker's discussion of the social, productive processes involved in space becoming place in his essay 'The Idea of a Critical Literary Geography' (2005), are thus important to thesis, in that they suggest a way in which the social space of post-devolution Wales is in dialogue with its literature. Thacker recently conceived of a critical literary geography in the following terms:

A critical literary geography would trace how social space intrudes upon the internal construction of spatial forms. *Literary texts represent social spaces, but social space shapes literary forms.*²³

Thacker's recasting of literary geography represents a significant definition in the field of geographical criticism within literature. Instead of viewing geographical themes in literature as metaphorical, 'subjugating [a text's] spatiality to that of an aesthetic theme or trope',²⁴ Thacker suggests a materialist turn, with an emphasis on the dialogic relationship between geography and literature. Place, or *defined* space, is part of a productive process that is materially manifested in various forms, and as such it should be read as being materially constructed and defined within the social climate in which it is produced. Instead of treating a literary text's geography as secondary, or subservient to, its narrative, Thacker suggests that the social space in which the text is created is entwined in crucial, meaningful ways with the text's literary form.²⁵

²³ Andrew Thacker, 'The Idea of a Critical Literary Geography', *New Formations: A Journal of Culture/Theory/Politics* ('The Spatial Imaginary'), 57 (Winter 2005-6), 56-73, p. 63.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 56.

²⁵ An idea that is clearly influenced by the work of Lefebvre and Moretti.

Thacker distinguishes his *critical* literary geography from its forbears by focusing on the recursive way in which geographical space forms literary space, a similar formulation to Westphal's delineation of 'real and fictional spaces', in that they both contend that the border between the two is permeable, and their relationship is dynamic and reciprocal. In his analysis of Jean Rhys's *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, Thacker writes that

[...] the spatial style of her fiction bleeds into the hotel rooms of her characters, the sites of the city, and then into the wider national territories of her texts [...] [S]he inhabits no singular space.²⁶

Thacker also suggests that

[...] [t]he effect of this heterotopic writing is thus to render her texts as disconnected mosaics, containing piecemeal images of her characters' lives that parallel the disjointed experience of different material geographies.²⁷

The space *of* Rhys's text, its stylistic features, 'bleeds into' the space *in* the text, the various locations both national and local. In introducing the concept of heterotopic writing, Thacker emphasises the embeddedness of Rhys's text in the spaces represented in her fiction. Foucault, writing on heterotopias, contends that:

²⁶ Ibid., p. 72. Jean Rhys, *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971).

²⁷ Ibid., p. 71.

The mirror functions as a heterotopia [...]: it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there.²⁸

Rhys's heterotopic writing is rendered real and connected by Thacker's reading, not through metaphor or allusion, but by the very space of the text and its tenancy of the space of the page. In emphasising critical literary geography's focus on the space *of* the text, Thacker highlights (and distinguishes his reading from) significant paradigms in literary geography. One such paradigm referenced is Fredric Jameson's 'too easy' affiliation of temporality with modernism, as well as Jameson's contention that *postmodernism* is spatial.²⁹ In his discussion of literary Modernism and spatiality, Thacker suggests that 'there is no sense in trying to understand how a modernist text responds to the creation or adaptation of a particular location without grasping that both social space and literary space operate in relationship to historical co-ordinates.'³⁰ Thacker's observation is particularly important to this piece, given that it explores the spatiality of literature within the historical (temporal) framework of devolution.

The suggestion that postmodernism is spatial, according to Westphal, 'correlated the weakening of the concept of historicity to a lack of depth, which is the primary dimension

²⁸ Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p. 24.

²⁹ Thacker, 'Critical Literary Geography', p. 58.

³⁰ Andrew Thacker, *Moving Through Modernity: Space and Geography in Modernism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 5.

(or nondimension) of a culture of the image and of the simulacrum'.³¹ Westphal thus situates the 'culture of the image' and its bi-dimensionality as being entwined with Jameson's 'logic' of late twentieth-century capitalism. Another significant paradigm in literary geography highlighted by Thacker is that utilised in Franco Moretti's *Atlas of the European Novel* (1998), which attempts to demonstrate how 'geography shapes the narrative structure' of the novel, which Thacker contends 'puts a lot of faith in the "objectivity" of maps... [giving] little attention to critiques such as that of J.B. Harley of cartography's imbrication with power'.³² Moretti reverses the paradigmatic use of maps as frontispieces in literature by creating original maps, as well as utilising graphs and genetic tree diagrams in another of his significant works, *Graphs, Maps, Trees* (2005), to analyse the novel.³³ Thacker positions critical literary geography as being more focused on textual specificities, suggesting that

[w]e should reconnect the representational spaces in literary texts not only to the material spaces they depict, but also reverse the movement, and understand how social spaces dialogically help fashion the literary *forms* of texts [...] Emphasis should

³¹ Westphal, *Geocriticism*, p. 15. Westphal's position is thus also susceptible to Thacker's critique.

³² Franco Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel* (London: Verso, 1998), p. 8; Thacker, 'Critical Literary Geography', p. 60.

³³ Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History* (London: Verso, 2005). Thacker notes readings of Joseph Conrad under the rubric of literary geography and modernism, given the 'porosity of the links between a critical literary geography and postcolonial approaches' ('Critical Literary Geography', p. 58), as well as drawing attention to the potential pitfalls of approaches such as that of Moretti: 'sometimes you may draw a map of a novel, following Moretti's model, and then see nothing of note – does this invalidate a spatial reading of a text, or simply suggest a less cartographic approach to the space of a text?' ('Critical Literary Geography', p. 61).

be devoted to spatial features of literature such as typography and layout on the page.³⁴

The work of critical literary geography is conducted in its analysis of the internal economies of the text at various levels, with an awareness of the dialogic relationship that the text bears to *social* space as well as *material* space, both of which are part of a process of production. In acknowledging this dialogue, Thacker notes that the literary text itself is conducting geographical work. To expand from an analysis of the internal economies of a text, perhaps into the dialogic relationship between textual form and the capitalist economies that enable (or indeed inhibit) its production, will be particularly valuable to this thesis. This is especially evident in the way in which the Welsh Assembly has begun to insert itself into the productive space of contemporary Welsh literature (by commissioning series such as the Library of Wales, as well as public poetry).³⁵ In this regard, critical literary geography's conception of the creation of textual space appears almost antithetical to Charles Olson's seemingly outdated maxim: 'FORM IS NEVER MORE THAN AN EXTENSION OF CONTENT'.³⁶ Thacker continues:

³⁴ Thacker, 'Critical Literary Geography', p. 63.

³⁵ See the Library of Wales website for more information:

<<http://thelibraryofwales.com/contact>>

³⁶ Charles Olson, 'Projective Verse', in *Selected Writing of Charles Olson*, ed. R. Creeley (New York: New Directions, 1966), p.16. Angharad Saunders also notes this dichotomy when she writes: '[i]n pondering this inherent flexibility it is pertinent to inquire whether the form can ever know something at a dissonance with the content. For textual geographers such a situation would work to undermine claims to authority and truth, but for literary geographers it opens up the diversity of the text as place', 'Literary Geography: Reforging the Connections', *Progress in Human Geography* 34(4) (2010), 436–452, p. 441.

[s]uch hermeneutic steps, considering the interlinking of material and metaphorical spaces, tracing issues of representation and power, the role of maps, and the impact upon spatial forms of particular geographies, are all crucial components of the practice of a critical literary geography.³⁷

The internal spatial form of a literary text should be reconnected with the material space in which it is produced, and which, in turn, it defines. That is, the text's internal spatial organisation should not be looked upon solely as an extended metaphor for the space it describes (although this is not to say that it can't be analysed at such a metaphorical level); rather, the textual space of the page enacts its own geography that should not be read as simply secondary to the narrative. This is the object of Thacker's literary geography, focusing not only on metaphorical spaces or the metaphoricity of space, but also identifying the materiality of a literary, textual geography. The internal space of a text, according to Thacker, is a product of the space in which it is conceived and produced, and as such demands attention that would not be warranted if textual form were simply an extension of the content or narrative. Indeed, placing the content and layout of the page in binary opposition with one another is an additional, and unwarranted Manichean conceit of the early literary geography to which Brosseau alludes.

In 'Literary Geography: Reforging the Connections' (2010), Angharad Saunders acknowledges Thacker's reconceptualisation of the field of literary geography, but in doing so questions and problematises the 'literariness' of the texts on which literary geography

³⁷ Ibid., p. 72.

traditionally conducts its work.³⁸ Saunders emphasises the increasingly blurred lines between genres and modes, as occasioned by postmodernism:

‘What is literature?’ This is particularly pressing given the current proliferation of textual forms and the increasing blurring between different modes of cultural and linguistic expression occasioned by postmodernist sensibilities. The result is a very ambiguous and unstable term of reference which is dissected by questions of spatial difference, temporal change and intertextuality.³⁹

The potential differences between the reading of non-fictional and fictional texts are fundamental to Saunders’s question, although a pluralistic approach encompassing a variety of texts, in the vein of Westphal’s multifocalization, is crucial to an understanding of contemporary literary geography. Harley’s cartographical work, which was predicated on a movement away from ‘what *cartographers* tell us maps are supposed to be’, and towards an approach ‘rooted in social theory rather than in scientific positivism’, may be expanded to literature that carries out explicitly cartographic work, such as the travel guide.⁴⁰ In socialising, and spatialising, the text – viewing it in the context in which it is written and where it is read – Saunders suggests the term ‘positionality’: ‘the relative powers, motivations and levels of engagement different readers and writers have and the geographies these belie’.⁴¹ Saunders identifies the techniques that make a text ‘literary’, and the arbitrariness of this distinction as follows:

³⁸ Angharad Saunders, ‘Literary Geography: Reforging the Connections’, p. 438.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 437.

⁴⁰ Harley, ‘Deconstructing the Map’ (2001), pp. 151, 152.

⁴¹ Saunders, ‘Literary Geography: Reforging the Connections’, p. 449.

It is here, in the manner and execution of a text's content, that the very literariness of literature resides: its poeticism, the properties that make such a work a fictive discourse [...] Yet identifying this internal poetic form is problematic, for it often subjects the spatial to the aesthetic, using the former merely to reinforce the significance of the latter.⁴²

Saunders rightly points out the incompleteness of such an approach that 'subjects the spatial to the aesthetic', given the plurality of textual approaches that has, as she suggests, been 'occasioned' by postmodernism. While Brosseau rightly emphasises that early literary geographical interpretations dealt with 'examples taken from the nineteenth-century realist novel tradition', it appears that readings of different, even experimental, texts have begun to displace these.⁴³ Saunders reiterates the potential scope of literary geography in this regard:

The focus here is mainly upon fiction, primarily because it has predominated the subdiscipline's work thus far, but this should, perhaps, be reason enough to encourage movement beyond the novel and examine how the patterns and processes of literary geography work more widely.⁴⁴

This 'movement beyond' is indeed something that requires further attention, as Damian Walford Davies points out:

⁴² Saunders, 'Literary Geography: Reforging the Connections', pp. 446-7.

⁴³ Brosseau, 'Geography's Literature', p. 337.

⁴⁴ Saunders, 'Literary Geography: Reforging the Connections', p. 439.

Though literary geography has hitherto been fixated on the novel, [...] recent literary-geographical engagements with modernist and postmodernist works have sharpened our sense of the literary text and its constellatory spaces as discursive constructions embedded in wider social practices.⁴⁵

Critical literary geography and geocriticism have thus instigated a shift of focus, not simply from the realist novel, but from an analysis of literary 'data fields', encouraging the geocriticism of textual modalities that do not easily conform to such reductive analysis or data extraction (such as postmodern fiction/poetry). In discussing post-devolution non-fiction as well as fiction, this thesis will attempt to multifocalize its analysis of representations of Welsh spaces, while also locating these real and imaginary spaces in their specific post-devolution co-ordinates.

In exploring a question perhaps most famously posed by Jean-Paul Sartre, 'what is literature?',⁴⁶ Saunders refers to David Lodge's *The Modes of Modern Writing*, stating that 'Lodge assumes that a literary reading requires interpretation, whereas other forms of writing merely require decoding'.⁴⁷ The contention that a text obscures meaning and resists interpretation is perhaps the product of a 'postmodernist sensibilit[y]'. Texts can, of course, draw the reader's attention to this very effect (the poet Charles Bernstein called these

⁴⁵ Davies, *Cartographies of Culture*, p. 6.

⁴⁶ Jean-Paul Sartre, *What is Literature?*, Bernard Frechtman trans. (London: Methuen, 1950)

⁴⁷ Saunders, 'Literary Geography: Reforging the Connections', p. 438. David Lodge, *The Modes of Modern Writing* (London: Arnold, 1979).

‘antiabsorptive’).⁴⁸ These texts subvert traditional modes of delivery and ‘flaunt’ their artifice, frequently using the space of the page in increasingly unorthodox ways, a feature found in literature and poetry in the wake of postmodernity.⁴⁹ In their experimentation with a text’s ‘internal space’, the antiabsorptive works to which Bernstein refers highlight the dissonance often created in the process of representation, and suggest that the formal (internal) space of a text cannot be dissociated from its content. Meaning, as with geography, is not something to be simply abstracted from text, even in the case of non-fictional texts, of which Saunders writes: ‘[t]hese texts may know something but this only becomes consequential when spatialized social practices valorize this as knowledge’.⁵⁰ Non-fiction requires a validation on the part of the reader, an acceptance that what is written is a ‘truth’, in order for ‘knowledge’ to be transmitted. To question ‘what literature knows’, as Saunders suggests, ‘is not to become embroiled in debates *vis-à-vis* the “death of the author”, but rather to draw attention to the way in which the literary voice is crafted at various tenors and pitches, some of which are more audible than others.’⁵¹ The inclusion of both non-fiction and fiction in this thesis (as well as poetry), is done so in an attempt to prioritise the ways in which the texts are in dialogue with geographical spaces in post-devolution Wales in a variety of ways. Imaginative and real Welsh geographies negotiate Welsh space at ‘various tenors’, but a reading of both fiction and non-fiction (as well as maps and election data) can help to create the kind of multifocalized approach envisaged by Westphal.

⁴⁸ Charles Bernstein, ‘Artifice of Absorption’, *A Poetics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 30. Experimentation with literary form was also a feature of the work of modernists: James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, for example (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

⁵⁰ Saunders, ‘Literary Geography: Reforging the Connections’, p. 440.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 448.

Post-Devolution Thirdspace

CONTROVERSIAL plans to turn off 9,000 street lights in Newport were given the go ahead despite opposition [...] The move will save the council around £200,000 of the £1 million it spends a year on energy and would reduce its carbon footprint.

(Headline from the *South Wales Argus*, 11 March 2012)

Then for the Strand again, now sunset flushed, beginning to twinkle with multitudinous lamps – I had hardly seen a lamp-lit street before.

Arthur Machen, *Far Off Things* (1922)

In light of devolution, it is important to reconnect the literary space with the real, and to understand how social space both affects and is affected by literary representation and production. Contemporary psychogeography highlights the ways in which certain spaces exert an influence over behaviour, and thus the experiences that they generate. If devolution has affected the human and cultural geography of certain Welsh spaces, one might question whether or not these spaces produce different experiences that may, in turn, prompt new ways of conceiving, perceiving, and experiencing post-devolution Welsh spaces. Edward Soja referred to this combination of the 'real-and-imagined' spaces as *thirdspace*; a combination of the 'Firstspace perspective that is focused on the "real"

material world and a Secondspace perspective that interprets this reality through “imagined” representations of spatiality’.⁵²

While psychogeography has some prominent Welsh practitioners, the most important Welsh practitioner of psychogeography (and a writer of key importance to the establishment of the practice), was Arthur Machen. Merlin Coverley has argued that Machen had an acute sense of the effect that place has upon writing, and that his body of work is part of a trajectory that can trace its routes back to Thomas De Quincey, through Guy Debord’s Situationists, and up to and through contemporary writers such as Peter Ackroyd and Iain Sinclair. Machen, according to Coverley, ‘becomes a prototype for both the *flaneur* and for today’s breed of psychogeographer’.⁵³ There are also significant contemporary practitioners of psychogeography (which is not only literary in dimension) in Wales, such as Peter Finch (Cardiff), and Zoë Skoulding (Bangor). The application of the adjective ‘psychogeographical’ to literature has become a ubiquitous description for writers who write about place (notwithstanding the two genuine Welsh practitioners in Finch and Skoulding), and how they utilise their environments in their writing, or how their writing consciously makes the connection between place and writing explicit. However, its original practitioners, such as Debord, touted its potential as a subversive act. By wandering through a city – conducting a *dérive* – and not following the ‘path of least resistance’, a writer might be able to report back on their experience in an objective manner.⁵⁴ While there is a clear irony to some of the Situationists’ suggestions about lighting in the city (such as

⁵² Edward Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p. 6.

⁵³ Merlin Coverley, *Psychogeography* (Harpending: Pocket Essentials, 2006), p. 49.

⁵⁴ Guy Debord, ‘Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography’, *Les Lèvres Nues*, 6 (1955), not paginated <<http://library.nothingness.org/articles/Sl/en/display/2>>

recommending that subways were ‘poorly lit with dim, blinking lights’), there is one particular proposal that was suggested that ‘All street-lamps should be equipped with switches; lighting should be for public use.’⁵⁵ In effect, Debord and his colleagues suggested a pure democratisation of street lighting, allowing local residents the option of choosing whether to light their streets. Street lighting can thus be seen as a highly politicised, and politicisable issue. For example, a week prior to Newport Council’s decision, and on a rather more dystopic note, Cardiff County Council mooted the prospect of using street lights as a means to modify the behaviour of its citizens, or as one headline announced: ‘Pink Cardiff street lights plan “to deter Asbo jobs”’.⁵⁶ The purpose was to discourage young people from loitering outside a shopping centre because pink light would make any acne more visible. Psychogeography often attempts to function as a rebuke to such attempts at control.

The town of Caerleon-on-Usk, birthplace of Machen, has no doubt undergone significant changes since his death in 1947. Street lights, somewhat (but likely not completely) alien to Machen prior to moving to London as a young aspiring writer, illuminate the town at night and enable those who live there to navigate it without the aid of handheld gas lamps or candles (or torches built into smart phones), in a way that was previously impracticable. Machen may of course simply be overstating the impact that the London street lights had on his younger self.⁵⁷ However, his description of the ‘multitudinous lamps’ of the Strand reveals interesting contrasts between the urban centre of London and his childhood home in Gwent. The description naturalises their artificial light. The adjective ‘twinkle’, rather than

⁵⁵ Debord, ‘Project for Rational Improvements to the City of Paris’, *Potlatch*, 23, 13 October 1955 <<http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/presitu/potlatch23.html>>

⁵⁶ *BBC News*, 5 March 2012 <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-17260959>>

⁵⁷ Also, while he had likely encountered street lighting prior to moving to London, it was almost certainly not on a comparable scale to that of London.

evoking the lamps, invokes more immediate associations with the light emitted by the stars with which Machen would have been more familiar from his rural upbringing (owing to less light pollution in his rural childhood home in the Old Rectory in Llandewi Fach), than the steady beam of unnatural electric light. The effect of Machen's description, written in a volume of his autobiography, inscribes a fictional narrative upon a real geographical location. Thus, Machen's observations about London street lighting are as much about the difference between (and connectedness of) London and Welsh geographies, thus problematising strict delineations between the two. The way in which Machen (and his Welsh psychogeographical descendants) fuse together real and imagined spaces is of crucial importance to this thesis.

While London is the nucleus of most of Machen's early fiction, in his autobiographical work (and later fiction) he frequently describes his romantic attachment to Wales. Elsewhere in *Far Off Things* he writes how he considered it his 'greatest piece of fortune' that he 'was born in that noble, fallen Caerleon-on-Usk, in the heart of Gwent'. Machen's fiction can thus be seen to take place in a complex geographical space, in which the more alien (but nonetheless *real*) aspects of London such as electric street lights are, consciously or not, rendered in conceptual, metaphorical terms. There is an evident contrast between Machen's lived experience of the city of London and his early life in Wales (to which he did eventually return before his death in 1947). The 'twinkling' street lights are thus an emblem of this simultaneity; a narrative that dually occupies London and Welsh spaces. This simultaneity, which is in effect the product of a literature that occupies multiple spaces, is important to this discussion of devolution. While Skoulding is perhaps an outlier – a poet who presents a clear theoretical engagement with the way in which literature represents

space – a number of the writers discussed in this thesis problematise fixed notions of place, and intertextually invoke other, non-Welsh spaces in their work.

The bleeding of Machen's fiction into a conceptual *thirdspace* is clear in the following passage from an article by J.P. Hogan on a walk in search of the 'hidden tavern immortalised' in Machen's *The London Adventure*. Machen's book begins with the following line:

There is a certain tavern in the north-western parts of London which is so remote from the tracks of men and so securely hidden that few people have ever suspected its existence.⁵⁸

Machen's tavern, according to Merlin Coverley, reveals 'his fascination with the neglected corners of suburban London'.⁵⁹ Machen's preoccupation with hidden parts of London became a signature of his non-fiction as well as the protagonists in his fiction. Machen's predilection for hyperbole, bearing in mind that *The London Adventure* was published as a volume of autobiography, produces a significant split between the place *as it is described* and the place *as it is imagined*. Hogan concludes his search for Machen's tavern as follows:

It would have been wiser, on that Sunday evening, to have stayed in my garden and re-read 'The London Adventure'.

⁵⁸ Arthur Machen, *The London Adventure or The Art of Wandering* (Newport: Three Impostors, 2014), p. 5.

⁵⁹ Merlin Coverley, in his foreword for Arthur Machen, *The London Adventure or The Art of Wandering*, p. x.

For then the 'remote tavern' would have remained a reality (and a satisfying one at that), whereas by rushing in where an angel would hesitate I had merely seen with my own eyes a chimera.⁶⁰

Machen's *London* is topographically accurate enough for the real Firstspace (the tavern) to be found by Hogan. It is in writing about his underwhelming experience – a quite different portrayal of the tavern to Machen's – that Hogan's account demonstrates how real and imagined spaces recursively combine with one another. Hogan's account demonstrates the expectation generated by Machen's account, and the subsequent divergence between the literary representation and the reality. Perhaps more significantly it also demonstrates the way in which representations of space are frequently conflicting. Hogan's search for Machen's tavern is thus beset with difficulty, given that his initial encounter with the tavern is clearly affected by his reading of Machen's account. When Tally argues that our 'understanding of a particular place is determined by our personal experiences with it, but also by our reading about others' experiences', we might notice how Machen's representation remains unattainable. A discussion of the *thirdspace* of the tavern – the interaction between the real space and the differing ways it has been conceptualised by Machen and Hogan – allows for heterogeneous conceptualisations of real places. It is a problem identified by Westphal, who argues that '[t]he multiplication of visions of reality, once concentrated in an absolute determinism, and the infinite malleability of literary

⁶⁰ J.P. Hogan, 'A London adventure in St John's Wood', *The Guardian*, 29 June 1945. Republished in the 'From the Archives' feature
<<https://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2012/jun/29/archive-1945-arthur-machen-london-pub>>

discourse seem consubstantial in the postmodern age'.⁶¹ This heterogeneity can be problematic for static definitions of post-devolution Welsh spaces. It is a problem recognised by Thomas in his dismantling of the idea that certain Welsh landscapes (urban/rural) *only* produce certain kinds of writing. This thesis will seek to re-map Welsh literature since devolution, and in doing so try to maintain the heterogeneity of post-devolution Welsh spaces. There are some instances in which it is profitable to emphasise long-standing divisions between Welsh spaces, such as that which might be seen in the burgeoning economy of literary tourism. In contesting the connection between space and its representations, contemporary fiction (and indeed poetry and non-fiction), can subvert static definitions of particular spaces. By employing this framework, this thesis might seek to deconstruct the ways in which post-devolution spaces are defined, and emphasise, or reclaim their heterogeneity. This applies to Welsh spaces, as well as those beyond its borders.

⁶¹ *Geocriticism*, p. 35.

Literary Geography and Literary Tourism in Wales



'Map of Literary Tourism in Wales', from a *Literature Wales: Literary Tourism Events Programme: April – October 2013*

Hogan is not the only writer inspired by Machen's description of London life to seek out the real locations. A recent series of 'Literary Tourism' events organised by Literature Wales is evidence of a trend within Wales and beyond to reconnect the sometimes abstract literary

conceptualisations of space with real geographical environments.⁶² The series of events, which had titles such as ‘Soho Welsh’ (including a walk in Machen’s footsteps), ‘Wild West [Wales]’, and ‘Riotous Rhondda’, indicates a broad understanding of the connection between Welsh places and its diasporic geographies with the literature that is generated by such spaces.⁶³ The map, however, doesn’t challenge traditional conceptions about the cultural landscape of Wales. In fact, it reinforces Dennis Balsom’s contentious ‘Three Wales Model’ (discussed in detail in chapter six).

Zoë Skoulding’s more self-consciously theoretical work subverts the connection between imaginary space and real topography. For example, her collection *Remains of a Future City* contains a trilogy of poems with titles such as: ‘Forest with A to Z of Cardiff’, ‘Preselis with Brussels Street Map’, and ‘Llanddwyn Beach with Directions for Copenhagen’.⁶⁴ The poems are constructed using a psychogeographical technique, which is exploring one place to the map of another, described by Debord in the following terms:

The production of psychogeographic maps, or even the introduction of alterations such as more or less arbitrarily transposing maps of two different regions, can contribute to clarifying certain wanderings that express not subordination to randomness but complete *insubordination* to habitual influences.⁶⁵

⁶² See <<http://www.literaturewales.org/literary-tourism/>>. This series of events is also mentioned in Davies, *Cartographies of Culture*, pp. 7-8.

⁶³ See <<http://thelibraryofwales.com/node/129>>

⁶⁴ Zoë Skoulding, ‘Preselis with Brussels Street Map’, in *Remains of a Future City* (Bridgend: Seren, 2008), pp. 49-51.

⁶⁵ See Debord, ‘Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography’.

'Preselis' is described by Neal Alexander as 'a kind of psychogeographical double exposure [that describes] a walk on a Pembrokeshire mountain-side whilst imaginatively navigating the cityscape of Europe's civic capital',⁶⁶ and Alice Entwistle suggests that 'Preselis' '[o]pen[s] up the gap between actual and signified which map makers and users tend to occlude'.⁶⁷ Skoulding describes the poem's central conceit in the following terms: 'Even while you're in one location, you are simultaneously linked to many others.'⁶⁸

One of the strengths of Machen's gothic fiction is how it draws upon the difference between urban and rural. This feature was also acknowledged by Machen as problematic, as it often resulted in creating a binary opposition between the light of London and the darkness of Wales.⁶⁹ The tone nonetheless culminated in what is referred to by Jane Aaron as a 'tone of mystic transcendence, inspired by the Welsh landscape [...] [that] remains dominant throughout Machen's later works'.⁷⁰ This is clearly in evidence in the story that gained Machen his initial notoriety, *The Great God Pan*, the action of which mainly takes place within London but consistently recalls to Caermaen, the fictionalised version of Caerleon.⁷¹ It is by stating this illuminatory *difference* between the urban centre (and the centre of empire), and rural Wales that Machen calls his readers' attention to the power that human

⁶⁶ Neal Alexander, 'Here and there: Poetry after devolution in Wales and Northern Ireland', upcoming.

⁶⁷ Alice Entwistle, *Poetry, Geography, Gender: Women Rewriting Contemporary Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013), p. 151.

⁶⁸ Fiona Owen, 'A City of Words: Zoë Skoulding interview by Fiona Owen', *Planet* 166 (2004), 57-62, p. 61.

⁶⁹ For example, the opening of his short story *N* features a group in a pub in London who become distracted by images of Llanthony Abbey on the wall, and begin re-telling Welsh folkloric stories such as Gelert the Faithful. See Christopher Palmer, ed., *The Collected Arthur Machen* (London: Duckworth, 1988).

⁷⁰ Jane Aaron, p. 82.

⁷¹ Arthur Machen, *The Great God Pan* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2010).

beings are capable of exerting over their surroundings. Machen's street lights are indicative of the way in which place can affect literature and social space in a variety of ways. They also demonstrate the way in which state power can be exerted over social space, and its effects. Matthew Beaumont, whose *Night Walking* includes one of the most extensive studies of the development of publicly-funded street lighting, suggests that:

Dissatisfaction with [the private companies who controlled street lights] mounted, though, partly because they illuminated the streets for a limited time and at certain seasons, and partly because they were so little accountable to those citizens inclined to complain of poorly maintained lights.⁷²

Beaumont connects the widespread introduction of street lights across London to civilian 'dissatisfaction', and the need for greater accountability for such an important public service. That such a service could then be used as an attempt to modify citizens' behaviour illustrates how seemingly innocuous forms of government intervention can impact upon the lives of its citizens illustrates the importance of walking as a subversive act (a point that will be returned to in chapter six). It also illustrates a broader, perhaps more contentious point, about state intervention, and national and local political accountability.

With that in mind, Newport Council's decision in 2012 to turn off the lights caused consternation in the local press.⁷³ The proposal itself illustrates some significant changes to and pressures upon the social and geographical environment of Caerleon since Machen's

⁷² Matthew Beaumont, *Night Walking: A Nocturnal History of London* (London: Verso, 2016), p. 119.

⁷³ The council responsible for Caerleon.

lifetime. When reading the *South Wales Argus* article, it is noticeable through the interviews that public safety and crime are the predominant concerns of the local residents. This narrative has no doubt been reinforced by media hysteria concerning crime-ridden dark streets ('Blackout Britain'), and the historical association of night time with deviant or criminal behaviour.⁷⁴ The pressure on the council to placate residents of Newport and Caerleon was measured against issues of global significance, such as the need for local councils to accommodate budget cuts amidst a global recession and a programme of austerity instigated by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition in the UK Parliament. In addition to this was the need for local councils to respond (or at least be seen to be responding) to the pressures of climate change by reducing energy consumption. Newport was not alone in turning off its lights. Towns and cities across Wales, as well as the rest of the UK, also drew up similar plans to save money and cut energy consumption by turning off their lights, or replacing older inefficient bulbs with modern low-consumption LEDs.⁷⁵ London, the city that once fired the imagination of Machen and provided the environment in which he could wander the streets at night (walks often replicated by the protagonists in his novels), was not immune to the pressure created by budget cuts and climate change. The structural consequences of such a change in London and other urban centres highlight

⁷⁴ Although, as one report states, 'there was no evidence that any street lighting adaptation strategy was associated with a change in collisions at night. There was significant statistical heterogeneity in the effects on crime estimated at police force level'. Rebecca Steinbach, Chloe Perkins, Lisa Tompson, Shane Johnson, Ben Armstrong, Judith Green, Chris Grundy, Paul Wilkinson, Phil Edwards, 'The effect of reduced street lighting on road casualties and crime in England and Wales: controlled interrupted time series analysis', in *The Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* (July, 2015)
http://jech.bmj.com/content/early/2015/07/08/jech-2015-206012.short?g=w_jech_ahead_tab

⁷⁵ See David Derbyshire, 'Half a million lights go out in Blackout Britain: Councils blame cuts as streets are left in darkness', *The Daily Mail*, 5 February 2012
<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2096950/Half-million-lights-Blackout-Britain-Councils-blame-cuts-streets-left-darkness.html>

not only the importance of public services (even those that are perhaps taken for granted), but also the potential impact of global events (in this case, recession and climate change) upon a local community. The illumination of a single street light, which may have a profound impact on a local geographical environment, can nonetheless be regarded as a localised symptom of distinctly global forces. While it might be fanciful to suggest that Machen would not have become a writer (or more specifically, the kind of writer that he became), were he not so seduced by the allure of the city at night, there is undoubtedly a connection between his own subjective experience of his environment and his fiction. More succinctly, it is the urban environment that enables Machen's night wandering, that in turn enables his writing. In this regard, we might see how seemingly innocuous political interventions can have local consequences, or indeed how events of global significance can manifest in seemingly innocuous ways.

The presence of street lighting has for a long time been associated with the promotion of a safe environment, and to ward off antisocial behaviour, but there are other ways in which town planning may impact upon writing. Peter Finch, a writer and poet who has written extensively about Cardiff, highlights the changes in the rebranded Cardiff Bay (formerly Tiger Bay) that are themselves the result of the establishment of the Welsh Assembly, namely the Senedd and the Wales Millennium Centre. Finch writes:

I've traversed the area east to west and found it impossible to make easy progress. The Bay is delineated by its north south access routes – Bute Street, Lloyd George Boulevard, The City Link, Dumballs Road, the heavily-subsidised rail track from Queen Street that brings office workers in at 8.30 and then, the odd tourist

excepted, idles empty for the rest of the day. The architect Jonathan Adams sees this as one of the area's great problems. Population mobility is restricted. The multi-ethnic population of the original Butetown is separated from its richer and far more recent apartment-dwelling arrivals by the great dyke of the railway embankment. Get on any road and it will take you north.⁷⁶

The more pernicious effects of the regeneration of the Cardiff Bay area, which it must be said are not exclusively the result of devolution are here in evidence. Finch ironically renders Cardiff's lack of social mobility geographically, emblemised by a 'heavily-subsidised rail track'. A street named after Wales's last UK Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, is juxtaposed with a new retail park (City Link). More important to Finch, however, is the way in which these streets all tend to direct pedestrians in the same direction, and make certain routes that were once possible, impassable. Social mobility is thus rendered as physical impassability, and the way in which these new geographies restrict passage through Welsh spaces (as well as facilitating new routes), will be of interest in this thesis.

So, to return to the title of this thesis, 'Literary Geographies in Wales: Welsh writing in English and Devolution'. We might once again consider the ways in which writing in Wales has been impacted by narratives of independence and devolution. We might also consider the ways in which writers are affected by their environment, and in the case of Wales we might call this 'devolved' space. However, we must also consider the ways in which those writers have impacted the discussion of devolution (or Welsh nationalism), and consequently the way in which Welsh places have been impacted by that which is, or has

⁷⁶ Peter Finch, 'A Psychogeographer in the Bay', *Cambria*, 13.1 (2012), p. 36.

been, written about them. This reciprocity is key, especially given the asymmetric establishment of political autonomy in Wales (the way in which certain parts of Wales have been affected at different rates by devolution). This necessitates a discussion of the spatiality of devolution, rather than (only) as a historical event of national self-fulfilment.

The two research questions that will be addressed most directly in Part One of this thesis are as follows:

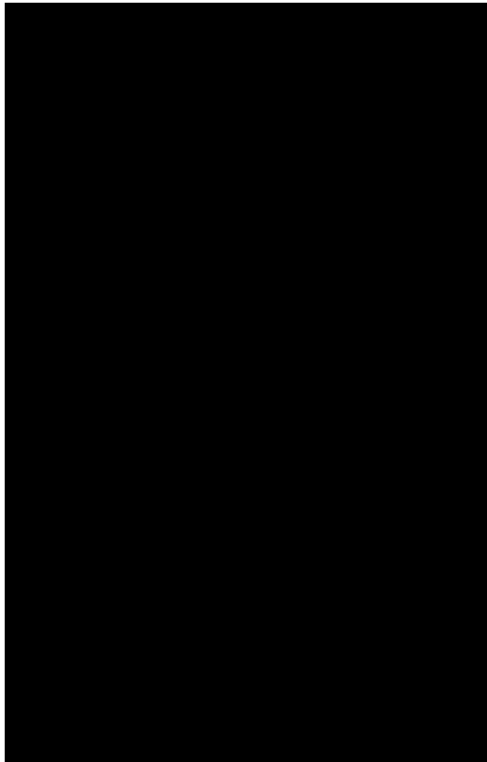
- What effect has devolution had on distinctively ‘nationalist’ literature and imaginative representations of Welsh geographies?
- How might non-Welsh literary geographies inform an understanding of post-devolution Welsh writing in English?

The two research questions that Part Two of this thesis will address, are:

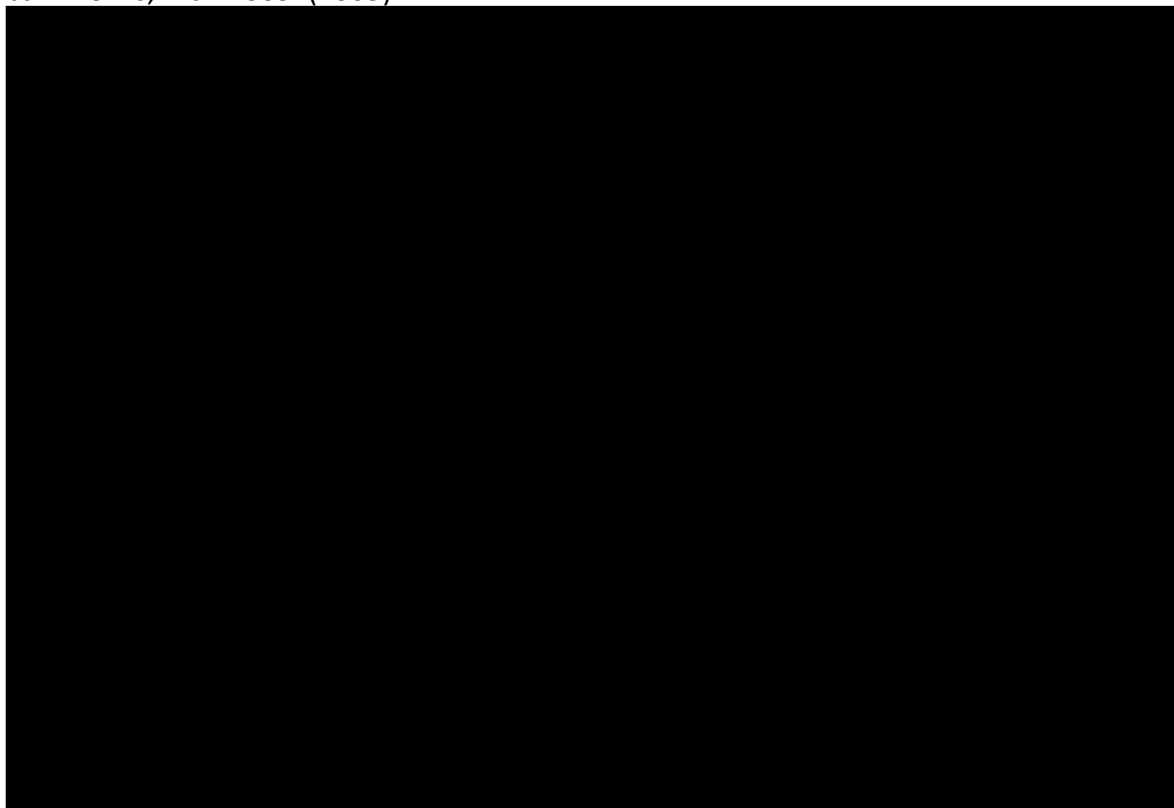
- How has the newly-autonomous devolved funding model affected post-devolution Welsh writing in English?
- How is devolution reflected directly in the representation of Welsh spaces post-1997? Furthermore, how might devolution be explored and understood as a spatial event?

The following section, on Jan Morris, will address a particular kind of narrative of devolution; one that explores colonialism (British, English, and even Welsh), Anglicisation (of language and culture), and the problematic question of a Welsh ethnicity.

Chapter Two: 'Going native': Jan Morris and Devolutionary Wales



Jan Morris, 'Hav 2005' (2005)



Iwan Bala, 'Pax Hav' (2016)

Jan Morris is a writer whose career began significantly prior to devolution. Nonetheless, her work is vital to an understanding of the place that Anglophone literature in Wales has had in developing the discourse of devolution. Morris, a Welsh-learner and ardent supporter of the Welsh language, has also been a member of Plaid Cymru, and considers herself a Welsh patriot (and is keen to avoid the term nationalist). Her more conservative-minded vision of Wales, which is rural, agricultural, and entirely Welsh-speaking, is reflective of a strand of Welsh writing supportive of political independence and wary of Anglicisation (ironic given Morris's own English ancestry and, as a former soldier, her connection to the expansion and defence of British colonialism and Empire). This chapter will explore Morris's nationalism/patriotism, and its relevance to contemporary conceptions of Welshness in literature since devolution.

Morris has come to be regarded as being 'electively Welsh', and has been described by M. Wynn Thomas in the following terms:

You could say she [Morris] has gone native, but a kinder, and more accurate description, is that she is an elective Welsh person, in a distinguished tradition of writers who have chosen Welshness. These people imaginatively reconstruct Wales as much as they discover it.¹

¹ M. Wynn Thomas, quoted in Nicholas Wroe, 'The Long Voyage Home', *The Guardian*, 6 October 2001 <<http://www.theguardian.com/travel/2001/oct/06/travelbooks.books>>

As Thomas observes, Morris is part of a tradition of writers from outside Wales (some with ancestral connections, some not) who ‘imaginatively reconstruct Wales’.² Perhaps ironically, the article in which the Thomas quotation above appears was published in response to Morris’s *Trieste* book, as opposed to one of the several books she has written about Wales. This reception is significant, as it is an instance in which Morris is clearly discussed as a Welsh writer (even if this is qualified by the adjective ‘elective’), when her text is not explicitly ‘about’ Wales.³ Morris’s literature, whether on Welsh subject matter or not, has woven itself into the fabric of contemporary Welsh writing, and some key recent works have been published in both languages. However, her ‘elective’ Welshness, and the political resonance of her geographical place in north Wales, inevitably complicates a discussion of national identity in her work. It calls into question its positionality – defined by Angharad Saunders as ‘the relative powers, motivations and levels of engagement different readers and writers have and the geographies these belie’ – especially in regard to both Morris’s dual-nationality and elective Welshness.⁴ The significance of the distinction between north and south Wales is even echoed by the compass points of the weather vane on the roof of Morris’s house ‘Trefan Morys’: ‘the points of the compass [...] are bilingually Welsh and English: G and D for *Gogledd* and *De*, E and W for East and West. This is partly because the Welsh names for East and West also begin with G and D, but it is chiefly a declaration, on

² Alun Richards had earlier referred to Morris as ‘like all converts [...] more Welsh than the Welsh’, in ‘More Welsh than the Welsh in the 21st century’, *The Independent*, 15 December 1994 <<http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/book-review-more-welsh-than-the-welsh-in-the-21st-century-1389658.html>>

³ Whereas Sinclair was rarely, if ever, discussed as a Welsh writer prior to devolution. That is, until his Welshness was explicitly acknowledged/advertised in his work.

⁴ Saunders, ‘Literary Geography: Reforging the Connections’, p. 449. ‘The Long Voyage Home’, *The Guardian*, 6 October 2001.

my part, of the nature and meaning of my house.’⁵ Morris asserts her place in Wales, not only by naming her house after herself (not only that but using the Welsh spelling of the surname, ‘Morys’, later adopted by her son Twm), but by referencing the cultural and linguistic duality of herself, her family, and her adopted nation.⁶

Morris’s imaginative reconstruction of Wales is not only apparent in her books about Wales, but also her books, both fiction and non-fiction, about other places. In attending to its ‘positionality’, a reading of Morris’s Wales is affected not only by her own personal conception (and espousal) of Welshness, but also the reception of her work in Wales, by readers familiar with its complex examination of Welshness of a particular variety (one that is clearly inflected by her geographical environment).⁷ Since Morris moved to Wales in 1967 she has been resident in Gwynedd, an area whose residents have been consistent supporters of devolution in Wales.⁸ In the 1979 devolution referendum it returned the largest Yes vote of all of the counties in Wales (34.4%); in 1997 it was third with 64.1%, and in 2011 it had the largest majority of Yes votes with 76.03%.⁹ In the 2011 Welsh devolution referendum, which focused on the issue of further powers for the National Assembly (which incidentally received the second-lowest turnout for any UK referendum, 35.6%), Gwynedd returned a national high Yes vote of 76%. Morris’s loyalty to a specific area of north Wales –

⁵ Jan Morris, *A Writer’s House in Wales*, National Geographic Directions Series (Washington: National Geographic Society, 2002), pp. 31-2.

⁶ Of the name change, Morris writes: ‘Some of my own Welsh children have preferred to spell their names in the old Welsh way, Morys, and I would do the same if I hadn’t left it too late.’ *Trieste*, p. 99. Presumably, Morris is referring to the effect a change might potentially have on her career (having already changed her name from James to Jan earlier in her career).

⁷ Angharad Saunders, ‘Literary Geography: Reforging the Connections’, p. 449.

⁸ See Gillian Fenwick, *Travelling Genius: The Writing Life of Jan Morris* (South Carolina: The University of South Carolina Press, 2008), p. 52.

⁹ Richard Dewdney, ‘Results of Devolution Referendums (1979 & 1997)’.

an area that encompasses a substantial diversity of opinion in relation to devolution, and in which only one other unitary authority, Anglesey, returned a yes vote in 1997 – is apparent in many of her Welsh works (both fiction and non-fiction), whether in her general denigration of the south or the evident disapproval of English incomers in the north. An unnamed source in Nicholas Wroe's article refers to the complexity of Morris's Welshness, stating that 'a lot of English-speaking Wales would look a little askance at her. They would see her as a romantic nationalist who has come from the outside with a selective and distorted view of Wales based on a too-passionate identification with a small, marginal and reactionary part of it.'¹⁰ However, if Morris's elective Welshness is potentially divisive, she shares a similarity with Sinclair regarding their English readership (or their reception in England). In the most recent study of Morris by Derek Johns, Morris's Welshness is discussed in the same chapter as her 'gender reassignment operation', suggesting that the two transitions occur in parallel and are borne out of equivalent desires (they do indeed occur during a similar period in Morris's career).¹¹ However, there are clear issues in the English understanding of Morris's Welshness, an issue of great significance in Morris's later writing. Johns' otherwise attentive book suggests that '[t]he revised edition of [Morris's *The Matter of*] *Wales* was published after the British Parliament voted in 1997 to devolve significant powers to the Welsh Assembly.'¹² While Johns is correct to draw attention to the significance of such an event to Morris's writing, this description entirely removes the referendum and the agency of the Welsh voters from the equation, likening devolution to an act of parliamentary acquiescence rather than a democratic process in which over a

¹⁰ Anonymous, in Nicholas Wroe, 'The Long Voyage Home'. The marginality, and marginalisation, of Morris's place in Wales is of particular importance.

¹¹ Derek Johns, *Ariel: A Literary Life of Jan Morris* (London: Faber and Faber, 2016), p. 173.

¹² *Ariel*, p. 177.

million voters participated.¹³ This is not to unduly criticise Johns (in a work of biography and not ‘in any way a scholarly work’), but to emphasise that in both cases matters of Wales are overlooked or misrepresented.¹⁴

The Morris texts on which I will focus in this chapter are discussed in chronological order, and are as follows: *A Machynlleth Triad* (1993), *Our First Leader* (2000), *Trieste and the Meaning of Nowhere* (2001), and *Hav* (2006).¹⁵ I will discuss these texts in relation to nationalism, utopianism, and devolution. The movement between non-fiction and fiction, and Welsh and non-Welsh texts, is intentional. The objective of this chapter will be to attempt to reintegrate Morris’s ‘Welsh’ texts and the perspective they offer on nationalism into her non-Welsh texts (and *vice versa*). First, however, it is important to outline what Morris’s idiosyncratic version of Welsh nationalism entails.

Patriotism, Nationalism, and a Brief Note on Patagonia

Crucially, Morris herself does not identify as a Welsh nationalist, as she explains in *A Writer’s House in Wales*:

¹³ Also, the Welsh Assembly was not yet in existence (in 1997) in order for powers to be bequeathed to it by parliament, and the parliamentary vote of significance to devolution was the Government of Wales Act in 1998. See

<<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/38/contents>>

¹⁴ *Ariel*, p. x.

¹⁵ Jan Morris and Twm Morys, *A Machynlleth Triad/Triawd Machynlleth* (Newtown: Gwasg Gregynog, 1993). The edition from which this chapter will cite is (London: Penguin, 1995); *Our First Leader: A Welsh Fable* (Llandysul, Gomer, 2000); *Trieste and the Meaning of Nowhere* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002); *Hav* (London: Faber and Faber, 2006).

I dislike the word 'nationalist,' which seems to imply chauvinism or aggressive traits, but I respect honest patriotism everywhere and I have come to think of myself as a minority patriot [...] who believes that the characteristics of a people, however insignificant, a language, a tradition, an ideal, are worth preserving for their own sakes.¹⁶

However, while Morris is clear about her attitude toward her Welsh patriotism, the issue is not so definite in her attitudes to nationalisms that have developed outside of Wales. Richard Phillips suggests that Morris displays an ambivalence to colonialism beyond the Welsh border:

Morris's travel writing is ambivalent in the three-fold sense that it is uneven in its sensitivity to colonial and postcolonial contexts and concerns; it has produced and is produced from the ambivalently in-between perspectives of transgendered subjectivity and assumed Welshness (linked to internal colonialism); and it is open to various (including critical and conservative) readings.¹⁷

While a writer as ambivalent towards Welsh nationalism as Sinclair recognises that England has wielded colonial power over Wales, Morris is keen to distance her patriotism from her (uneven) appraisal of colonialism. Morris's argument for preserving 'the characteristics of a people' does not extend to a criticism of the Welsh settlement of Patagonia, and it is worth questioning whether Morris's exceptional treatment of Y Wladfa is related to her overtly

¹⁶ *A Writer's House in Wales*, p. 6.

¹⁷ Richard Phillips, 'Decolonizing geographies of travel: Reading James/Jan Morris', in *Social & Cultural Geography* 2.1 (2001), 5-24, p. 18.

‘assumed’ (or elective) Welshness. In fact, Morris uses the preservation of culture in her argument *for* the settlement of Patagonia (and does not extend to an endorsement of the preservation of ethnicity), but her defence of the settlement entails a degree of historical revisionism. In her essay ‘Y Wladfa: Another Wales’, there is no focus on an indigenous culture or people disrupted and displaced by the colonial force, who were ‘not the boozy, bawdy, lyrical Welsh. These were the nineteenth-century chapel Welsh, God-fearing and Bible-loving.’¹⁸ The language that Morris uses to describe the settlement veers between uncritically colonial and what appears to be an ironic ventriloquizing of colonialist stereotypes (such as when she observes that in Y Wladfa ‘you may find yourself served by wild-looking semi-Indian people’).¹⁹ However, Morris’s language does not leave much room for such ambiguity, and she remains staunch in her description of the settler community as fundamentally Welsh, beginning her essay with the line ‘Every Welsh patriot wants, at least once in a lifetime, to visit the most resiliently Welsh of the Welsh communities overseas.’²⁰ However, Morris refers to the community’s forebears as ‘the original European settlers of Argentinian Patagonia’, who ‘had chosen a virtually uninhabited destination, ungoverned, no more than technically part of Argentina, and they called it simply Y Wladfa, The Colony’, and that the ‘Welsh were the first Europeans to settle it’.²¹ Morris then asserts the ethnic authenticity of the existing community, writing that ‘not a face was anything but recognizably Welsh’, and that ‘it was a tight-knit, ethnically cohesive society’.²² Morris justifies the settlement of Y Wladfa for the sake of preserving a particular Welsh way of life.

¹⁸ ‘Y Wladfa: Another Wales’, in *A Writer’s World: Travels 1950-2000*, 357-60, p. 358.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 358.

²⁰ ‘Y Wladfa: Another Wales’, p. 357.

²¹ Ibid, p. 357 & p. 360. There is an echo of the Falklands conflict in Morris’s observation that Patagonia was ‘no more than technically part of Argentina.’

²² Ibid, p. 358.

Referring to its people as 'recognizably Welsh' reinforces a problematic, homogenous understanding of what constitutes Welshness. That this settlement is romanticised by Morris further re-inscribes the binary of coloniser/colonised, with Morris representing both positions.

It must be said that there is still some debate as to whether Y Wladfa should be considered as a *colony*, or whether instead it should be discussed as a *settlement*. However, as Jasmine Donahaye argues, the difference between the two descriptors is, in this case, largely semantic:

Colonialism has associations that don't apply to Y Wladfa, so we don't call it a colony anymore, even if it means 'the colony'. But calling it a settlement doesn't change its nature. It was a settlement of people alien to that place, bringing with them a European language, culture, religion and set of values – people who set out expressly not to assimilate or adapt. 'Settlement' is not neutral; nor are settlers; nor is the act of settling. Whether or not it is backed by a state power or a military or an ideology that we find reprehensible, 'settlement' is just as charged as the word 'colony' or 'colonialism'.²³

Donahaye problematises the distinction between state-sponsored colonisation and the 'settlement' of Patagonia, arguing that the effects are largely the same in both cases (a

²³ Donahaye argues that the Welsh settlement Patagonia does in fact resemble a form of colonisation, even though it was privately sponsored, rather than state-funded. Jasmine Donahaye, 'Not That Kind of Settlement', *Click on Wales*, 05 June 2015
<<http://www.clickonwales.org/2015/06/not-that-kind-of-settlement/>>

semantic distinction as much as a political one). Donahaye suggests that the settlement of Patagonia displays various traits that we have come to associate with colonialism:

[The Welsh settlement of Patagonia] wasn't a special case, of course, and isn't. There is no avoiding semantically or otherwise the fact of the nineteenth-century Welsh settlement in Patagonia (or elsewhere), any more than there is any avoiding the fact of the nineteenth-century European Jewish settlements in Palestine. Both imported European people, languages and cultures and contributed to the displacement and culture change of an indigenous population.²⁴

Whether Patagonia is itself an instance of Welsh colonialism, Morris's essay reads like an exceptionalist defence of the settlement, disregarding any displacement of an indigenous population.²⁵ While Morris's work on Patagonia is pre-devolution, it has wider ramifications for an understanding of her sense of Welsh nationalism/patriotism. Consequently, Morris's conception of Welshness in Patagonia might be re-read back into her views on contemporary Welshness, especially regarding her implication that, along with the culturally Welsh aspects of the Patagonia settlers such as language, there is also a defence of the 'ethnically cohesive' Welshness of the same community. Similarly, her discussion of the settlement of this small territory in South America might be re-read into her post-devolutionary fiction, specifically in its unflinching insistence of Welsh ethnicity and nationality as somehow immutable.

²⁴ Donahaye, 'Not That Kind of Settlement'.

²⁵ There are also overtones of the defence for the British occupation of the Falklands in Morris's assertion that Y Wladfa was 'no more than technically part of Argentina' at the time of occupation, ('Y Wladfa: Another Wales').

Morris's embrace of Welsh nationalism is complex and occasionally contradictory, a fact perhaps evident in her preference for the term patriotism. In her historical account of Wales, she uses touchstones of nationalism such as the Owain Glyndŵr rising in 1404 ('the very image of the Welsh identity'), but also embraces the twentieth-century cultural nationalism of Saunders Lewis (founder of Plaid Genedlaethol Cymru – Plaid Cymru, and according to Morris 'the most passionate of all twentieth-century Welsh patriots').²⁶ It is important to stress here that cultural nationalism does not always advocate separatist politics. As Paul O'Leary suggests: 'cultural nationalism among the "subordinate" nations of the UK has been accommodated by the state in a variety of different ways and has not always led to separatist politics'.²⁷ However, in Morris's fiction, cultural nationalism of the sort advocated by Lewis (such as support for the preservation of the Welsh language), when combined with the revolutionary history of Glyndŵr, *does* directly lead to Welsh independence in some form or another. In *A Machynlleth Triad* (1993), Morris provides visions of a past, present and future Wales; a nation that attains independence at various points in her counterfactual revisionist versions of its history.²⁸ However, in order to discuss Jan Morris's treatment of Welsh nationalism in both her fiction and non-fiction, this chapter will utilise Anthony D. Smith's critique of the formation of the modern nation (or nation-state).²⁹ While there is not space in this chapter to provide a comprehensive application of Smith's ideas to the contemporary reality of Wales and devolution, I will utilise some of

²⁶ Morris, *Wales: Epic Views of a Small Country*, p. 5, p. 378.

²⁷ Paul O'Leary, 'Public intellectuals, language revival and cultural nationalism in Ireland and Wales: a comparison of Douglas Hyde and Saunders Lewis', *Irish Studies Review*, 17.1 (2009), 5-18, p. 15.

²⁸ <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/09670880802658109?needAccess=true>

²⁹ Jan Morris and Twm Morys, *A Machynlleth Triad* (London: Penguin, 1995).

²⁹ Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (London: Penguin, 1991).

Smith's key distinctions between Western ('civic') and non-Western ('ethnic') models of nationalism in reading Morris's post-devolution writing. This will include a discussion of some of Morris's key non-Welsh texts, as well as her treatment of nations and nationalism in her fiction. As a historian and traveller, Morris's experience of a variety of civic and ethnic nationalisms is evident in her discussions of contemporary Welsh nationalism, and this clearly feeds into her fiction. As such, it would be useful to consider briefly some fundamental developmental stages of nationalism, as outlined by Smith, and the importance of territorial and ethnic boundaries to such development. Similarly, it will attempt to understand the way in which Morris's cultural nationalism (inspired by figures such as Saunders Lewis) translates into Morris's political nationalism. Morris's fictional utopian spaces (such as *Hav*) afford her writing a greater degree of flexibility than her discussion of real spaces as potential utopias (such as Machynlleth), but this chapter will argue that these imaginary spaces are used as an arena in which Morris can discuss her utopian vision for Wales. Perhaps most importantly, it will question whether Morris's conceptions of a cultural-political nation-state of Wales are *utopias* (in the literary sense), or whether they are in fact a facet of a generalised utopianism discernible in some key mid-to-late twentieth-century Welsh texts. That is, whether Morris's vision for a future Wales is an experiment with a literary genre, or something more akin to a political manifesto.

Morris's position on Patagonia (the most prominent, if problematic, Welsh settlement), is central to such a discussion. It is crucial because it espouses a less popular (and increasingly unpalatable) form of 'ethnic' nationalism. Morris's position on the settlement of Patagonia provides a unique context for her utopian visions of Wales, which incorporates both cultural

and ethnic nationalist paradigms. Smith outlines his definition of 'ethnic nationalism' as follows:

Its distinguishing feature is its emphasis on a community of birth and native culture. Whereas the Western concept laid down that an individual had to belong to some nation but could choose to which he or she belonged, the non-Western or ethnic concept allowed no such latitude. Whether you stayed in your community or emigrated to another, you remained ineluctably, organically, a member of the community of your birth and were for ever stamped by it. A nation, in other words, was first and foremost a community of common descent.³⁰

The non-assimilation of the original settlers of Patagonia (identified by Donahaye), and their preservation of a line of 'common descent', is clearly evident in Morris's remarks about a 'recognizably Welsh', 'ethnically cohesive society'. Morris's pronouncements about the ethnically Welsh descendants of the original Patagonian settlers might be too unpalatable if applied to contemporary Wales, in which Morris's Welsh patriotism is outwardly cultural rather than ethnic (indeed, she chooses to belong to Wales). As Smith notes, 'every nationalism contains civic and ethnic elements in varying degrees and different forms.'³¹ However, these are nonetheless reflections on the preservation of a Welsh 'race' (rather than a cultural identity and a resultant ethnic cohesiveness), and lends an added meaning to Morris's reflections about Welsh nationalists in Wales, such as: '[Wales's] activists have long

³⁰ Smith, *National Identity*, p. 11.

³¹ Smith, *National Identity*, p. 13.

believed themselves to be of a special breed'.³² Morris suggests that the Patagonian Welsh community is an example of 'Welshness *in excelsis*', suggesting that the preservation of an ethnic Welshness sets the Patagonian Welsh apart even from Welsh-resident Welsh people. Such ethnic barometers of Welshness are increasingly problematic and unsustainable in twenty-first-century Wales.³³ Morris herself emphasises her dual nationality, and conflates it with ethnicity, when she writes: 'I am myself a racial half-breed (father Welsh, mother English), and I have experienced some of the lesser quandaries of a condition that has been so common here'.³⁴ The anachronistic term 'half-breed' is problematic here, but appears to indicate a further use of stereotypical colonialist, even racist language (although its irony is somewhat diminished by Morris's earlier references to Welshness *in excelsis*). Also, the breeding analogy echoes Morris's assertion about Welsh nationalists thinking themselves 'of a special breed'.³⁵

To return briefly to Smith's argument, we might also distinguish between the 'two routes by which different kinds of ethnic community were transformed into nations'.³⁶ 'The first', Smith writes, 'was state-sponsored.' However, as Smith continues,

[the] second route was more popular. It started from smaller demotic communities whose ethno-religious self-conceptions had to be exchanged for more activist, political ones [...] Small circles of educator-intellectuals, despite their differential

³² Morris, *Wales*, p. 2.

³³ This issue is comprehensively explored by Daniel Williams in *Wales Unchained: Literature, Politics and Identity in the American Century* (Writing Wales in English) (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2015).

³⁴ *Trieste*, p. 99.

³⁵ Morris, *Wales*, p. 2.

³⁶ Smith, *National Identity*, pp. 68-9.

responses to westernization and modernity, were intent on purifying and mobilizing 'the people' through an appeal to the community's alleged ethnic past.³⁷

This return to an alleged past is particularly resonant in Morris's Welsh texts. Whether in alternate history (in *Machynlleth Triad* and *Our First Leader*), or the imaginary utopia of *Hav*, there is a sense that in the absence of a unified and sovereign state, the nation must be built on an ethnic congruity. While this is not to suggest that Morris is herself an ethnic nationalist (and clearly her form of 'patriotism' prioritises shared cultural history rather than ethnicity), there is clearly a suggestion that some aspects of her Welshness are innate, a facet of 'special' breeding.

Jan Morris and Utopia

There is a further dimension to such a discussion, which is the intersection between overt (and literary) propaganda, and political writing that aspires to create or define a kind of utopia. For Morris, Patagonia's clear imperfections prevent it from becoming an aspirational vision of a Welsh utopia, as she writes: 'the Valley is hardly an eldorado'.³⁸ However, she does emphasise the importance of community and preserving culture and language. In connecting twentieth-century nationalism to utopian politics (and seeing it as a response to globalisation), David Harvey offers the following:

³⁷ Smith, *National Identity*, pp. 68-9.

³⁸ The essay in *A Writer's World* originally appeared in *The Independent* as 'The Green, Green Grass of Home', 7 January 1995 <<http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/the-green-green-grass-of-home-1566920.html>>

[One response] is to pursue the utopian vision of some kind of communitarianism (including movements of national redemption as an answer to the alienations and abstractions of a globalizing political economy and culture). Many political movements now trend in this direction, sometimes appealing to some sort of political mythology laced with nostalgia for a golden age of organic community.³⁹

We might see Welsh nationalism of the sort offered by Morris as a kind of utopian response to the effect of globalisation on indigenous cultures. Identifying Morris as a utopian writer is problematic because it is a genre in which she has only briefly operated. However, it would be more accurate to suggest that her writing (both fiction and non-fiction) displays utopian characteristics.⁴⁰

Critical work on utopias in the late twentieth century and at the beginning of the new millennium focuses on a significant trait of utopian literature, from Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) onwards: that the genre tends towards a kind of (proto-)communist ideology. A recent examination of social housing in Wales by Stephen Kay (which includes a foreword by Jan Morris), further cements the connection between socialism and utopia in a specifically Welsh context, presenting a thorough investigation into the influence of Robert Owen, a

³⁹ David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002), p. 85.

⁴⁰ It is worth noting that the only Welsh utopian writer/thinker writer to feature in the *Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature* is Robert Owen. See Gregory Claeys, ed., *Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). There is perhaps an uncanny echo of Jane Aaron's criticism of the *Gothic Fiction* entry in the same series (in which the only Welsh Gothic writer to feature is Arthur Machen). However, while Aaron rightly contends that 'a trawl of relevant bibliographies and library catalogues will result in a rich haul of literary materials that could arguably be categorised as Welsh Gothic', the same might not be easily said of Welsh literary utopias. Jane Aaron, *Welsh Gothic* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013), p. 9.

theorist of utopian socialism (born Newtown, Wales 1771).⁴¹ Morris displays conflicting attitudes toward the prospect of Welsh Independence as a means of achieving a Welsh utopia. A member of Plaid Cymru, whose position is currently one of support for independence from the United Kingdom, Morris's political affiliation is clear.⁴² However, as Richard Wyn Jones argues, '[at its inception] Plaid Cymru did not aspire to independent, sovereign statehood in the conventional sense'.⁴³ As Jones continues: 'In 2003, the party's annual conference voted unanimously to describe these in terms of "independence", a term that had been taboo since Saunders Lewis's foundational lecture in 1926 (Elias 2006)'.⁴⁴ However, it does necessarily follow that to be a nationalist is to also advocate for a sovereign state. To return to Smith:

nationalism is an ideology of the nation, not the state [...] The idea that nations can be free only if they possess their own sovereign state is neither necessary nor universal [...] The notion that every nation must have its own state is a common, but not a necessary deduction from the core doctrine of nationalism; and it tells us the nationalism is primarily a cultural doctrine or, more accurately, a political ideology with a cultural doctrine at its centre.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Stephen Kay, *Homes for Welsh Workers: from Robert Owen to 'The Garden City Movement' With a Gazetteer of planned communities in Wales 1800 to 1939* (Abergavenny: 325 Press, 2014).

⁴² The Plaid Cymru constitution still includes the aim 'to secure independence for Wales in Europe'. See <https://www.partyof.wales/uploads/Cyfansoddiad_Constitution.pdf>

⁴³ Richard Wyn Jones, 'From Utopia to Reality: Plaid Cymru and Europe', in *Nations and Nationalism*, 15:1 (2009), 129-147, p. 134.

⁴⁴ See Richard Wyn Jones, 'From Utopia to Reality: Plaid Cymru and Europe', p. 140. This is particularly pertinent to O'Leary's suggestion that cultural nationalism 'has not always led to separatist politics', cited above.

⁴⁵ Smith, *National Identity*, p. 74.

While Morris is a Welsh patriot who has advocated Welsh independence (and experimented with its effects in her writing), she is ultimately suspicious of devolution. The complexity of her acknowledged position as an incomer to Wales is ironically echoed by the use of overtly colonial language in a recent essay, 'As Others See Us'. She writes:

Wales is halfway to self-government now, but it was a precarious passage that brought us here, and there are still many citizens who doubt if the nation is really fit to govern itself. They don't quite trust it. My own experience is that, while I will trust my Welsh friends, neighbours and acquaintances with my life, I am not so sure about the Welsh generality, so to speak: Taffy may not be a thief, but he is quite often a manipulator.⁴⁶

In appropriating the old (and undoubtedly offensive) rhyme 'Taffy was a Welsh Man/ Taffy was a thief', Morris demonstrates a suspicion of Wales's devolved government, the Welsh Assembly Government, and its manipulation of nationalist sentiment for political ends.⁴⁷ This is compounded elsewhere in the essay when Morris bemoans the fact that 'plenty of Welsh citizens, too, are happy to do without national characteristics, in an age when it is so often considered racist to recognize [sic] them'.⁴⁸ Here Morris conflates cultural and ethnic nationalisms (without clearly denouncing the latter). Furthermore, the themes of nationalism, government, and independence are prevalent in Morris's travel writing, as well

⁴⁶ Jan Morris, 'As Others See Us', *Click on Wales*, 13 April 2014
<<http://www.clickonwales.org/2014/04/as-others-see-us-2/>>

⁴⁷ See: Iona Opie, Peter Opie, *The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951, 2nd edn., 1997), pp. 400-1; Meic Stephens, *The Oxford Companion to the Literature of Wales* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 569.

⁴⁸ Morris, 'As Others See Us'.

as her writing on Wales. Attention to such themes also forms a significant part of Morris's most substantive work of fiction, *Hav*. This can be partially contextualised as a facet of a pervasive early twenty-first-century movement in Welsh fiction that dealt with Welsh themes more confidently, or at least that Welsh writing became more of a visible presence outside of Wales (discussed in more detail in the following chapter). However, in Morris's writing, there is a combination of anachronistic colonial attitudes towards people and places (as can be seen in her celebration of Welsh Patagonia), as well as an agglomeration of both anti-colonial and post-colonial attitudes that implies a more nuanced, perhaps even tentative approach to the prospect of Welsh independence.

While her early career devoted considerable effort towards the composition of a lengthy assessment (and arguably endorsement) of the British Empire (culminating in the *Pax Britannica* trilogy), Morris's realignment with the movement for independence in Wales is a striking one. After all, this is a writer who once wrote: 'I played my own peripheral part in Empire [...] I was of the opinion at first that the longer the imperialists hung onto their positions, the better it would be for the world'.⁴⁹ This change in attitude has not resulted in Morris directing her energies to exclusively writing about Wales (nor should one expect it to, although she has increased her output in this regard), or even in the Welsh language (although both *A Machynlleth Triad* and *Our First Leader* were published in both English and Welsh, the original English text translated by her son Twm).⁵⁰ Rather, the increasing influence of Wales and Welsh identity can be seen in her writing about other places. As a

⁴⁹ Morris, writing about Gaza, in 'Imperial Consolations', from *Pleasures of a Tangled Life* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1989), p. 170.

⁵⁰ *Our First Leader: A Welsh Fable* (Llandysul, Gomer, 2000). Twm Morys's translation of *Our First Leader* was published separately as *Ein Llyw Cyntaf* (Llandysul: Gomer, 2001).

result, Morris's writing displays a contradictory, sometimes ambivalent approach to colonialism and sovereignty. A writer of real geographies as well as a creator of imaginative ones, Morris displays a wariness of cartographical positivism (or the *objectivity* of the map), and thus presents accounts of places that are both personal and anecdote-rich. Referring to Jorge Luis Borges's epilogue to *Dreamtigers*, Morris writes that '[Borges] got it right, when he told of an artist setting out to portray the world, but discovering that his "patient labyrinth of lines framed the image of his own face"'.⁵¹ As Brian Jarvis writes: 'Marginalised spaces are always implied and central to any map's significance, they are a clue to the ideology through which space is seen and felt.'⁵² Morris echoes Jarvis's insistence on the importance of marginalised spaces, writing of her own map collection:

Over there on the table is a mass of miscellaneous road atlases and gazetteers, varying from the huge *National Atlas of Wales* (area 8,015 square miles), which I can hardly lift, to a *Handy Atlas of the World* (area 196,938,800 square miles), which is about as big as a pocket diary.⁵³

Morris's map of post-reformation *Hav* at the beginning of this chapter, and Iwan Bala's own cartographical amalgam *Pax Hav*, display the sheer variation in style and scale of imaginative geographies of Wales and beyond.

So, Morris's adoption of a distinctly Welsh identity in her writing since the mid-1980s (she was born in Somerset, England in 1926), leaves an indelible trace on her writing on other

⁵¹ *Trieste*, pp. 185-6.

⁵² Brian Jarvis, *Postmodern Cartographies*, p. 8.

⁵³ *A Writer's House in Wales*, p. 94.

places. *Cymreictod* (Welshness) has become a defining reference point in Morris's writing, perhaps as a result of the way in which she adopted it. However, this term itself signifies a particular kind of Welshness. Richard Phillips, in an article exploring Morris's attitudes to colonialism in her travel-writing, writes:

Morris's writing is replete with the attraction to and repulsion from the imperial centre, which Bhabha diagnoses as the ambivalence of the imperial/colonial subject. While potentially sowing seeds of postcolonial resistance, this ambivalence is itself also a dimension of colonialism. Morris's Welshness compounds this ambivalence, since like her femininity it is overtly assumed, and like her performances of masculinity and then femininity it arguably exposes the performativity and constructed superficiality not only of Welshness but more generally of national and other essentialist identity politics.⁵⁴

While Morris's early writing appears fascinated by imperialism (specifically that of the British Empire), this attitude shifts towards ambivalence in her later writing. However, this latter ambivalence toward the British Empire appears to contradict Morris's more accommodating attitude toward the Roman occupation of Wales.⁵⁵ Phillips suggests that while '[a]ffection and nostalgia' might be 'interpreted as symptoms of an uncritical attitude towards imperialism', they might also 'be interpreted as a means of relegating imperialism

⁵⁴ Richard Phillips, 'Decolonizing geographies of travel: Reading James/Jan Morris', in *Social & Cultural Geography* 2.1 (2001), 5-24, p. 19.

⁵⁵ This will be discussed in more detail in relation to *A Machynlleth Triad* later in this chapter.

to the past, reducing it to the stuff of anachronism.⁵⁶ However, Phillips' suggestion that Morris's Welshness is performative (as is her femininity), disregards her frequent insistence that Welshness is as much innate as assumed. Morris's 'overtly assumed' nationalism is based not only upon geographic and bicultural (English/Welsh) binaries, but also, more problematically, ethnicity (an issue that arises in her discussion of Patagonia). Morris's exploration of places other than Wales appears through the conflicting lenses of colonialism and independence (of which the continuing movement towards further devolution of powers from Westminster to Wales can be seen as a constituent part).

The Utopian Impulse

Morris's *Hav* is arguably the most significant literary utopia to emerge from Wales in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (the title itself is a homonym for 'haf', the Welsh word for summer), but it is not the only example of Morris's utopian writing.⁵⁷ Indeed, one must be careful to make clear that utopia does not only signify the specific literary genre that has its roots in Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516). Ruth Levitas, in *The Concept of Utopia* (1990), suggests that 'depictions of the good society do not necessarily take the form of literary fictions – and indeed this form is only available under certain very specific historical conditions'.⁵⁸ Imaginings of a 'good society' are clearly not only the preserve of fiction writers. Fredric Jameson delineates 'two distinct lines of descendency from [Thomas] More's inaugural text [*Utopia*]: the one intent on the realization of the Utopian program,

⁵⁶ Phillips, p. 11.

⁵⁷ See *Hav* (London: Faber and Faber, 2006), p. 49. This pun is also used in the first branch of the *Mabinogion*, in which Arawn's nemesis is called 'Hafgan'.

⁵⁸ Ruth Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia* (Hertfordshire: Philip Allan, 1990), p. 4.

the other an obscure yet omnipresent Utopian impulse finding its way to the surface in a variety of covert expressions and practices.⁵⁹ Jameson's first category includes, among other *non-literary* categories, texts that are self-consciously (and generically) utopian, and as such includes 'written exercises in the literary genre'.⁶⁰ The second descendant is more complex, even covert, and is where Jameson situates political utopian advancements such as 'liberal reforms and commercial pipedreams', and 'piecemeal social democratic [reforms]'.⁶¹ This discussion of Morris's work is predicated on a critical connection between devolution and independence (both conceptually and in their implementation). In lieu of a political comparison between the various different models of devolution and independence that have either been implemented or contained within political manifestos that is beyond the remit of this piece, I wish to argue that both devolution and independence are connected in Morris's writing by Jameson's idea of the utopian impulse. As such, this chapter will discuss utopian literature in the context of political reform and devolution.

Levitas provides a useful starting point for a discussion of Morris's writing as utopian, because she explicitly states the importance of relating 'the variations in form, function and content [of the utopia] to the conditions of the generating society'.⁶² Morris's visions of Wales past, present, and future are presented in a variety of forms and genres; history, autobiography, fiction. Their function varies from a defence of culture and tradition

⁵⁹ Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London: Verso, 2007), p. 3. An alternative view of More's *Utopia* is provided by David Harvey, who offers: 'I had always thought that the purpose of More's *Utopia* was not to provide a blueprint for some future but to hold up for inspection the ridiculous waste and foolishness of his times', *Spaces of Hope*, p. 281.

⁶⁰ Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*, p. 3.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, p. 3.

⁶² Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*, p. 8.

(nostalgia and alternate history), to condemnations of the culture and traditions of a variety of colonial occupying forces. In content, they are often 'eutopian' (good place), rather than 'outopian' (no place), although as Levitas observes this category is almost entirely subjective, 'specifying what the good society would be, rather than reflecting on how it may be differently perceived.'⁶³ Phillip E. Wegner is sceptical of the insistence on discussing utopia solely as a genre, and proposes a study of utopias that

transgresses these temporal and spatial boundaries in a number of different ways.

First, the institution of a genre is one that circulates both within and across the very different institutional identities of national culture, periodizations, and canons, all of which, I would again stress, are like a genre in that their various concrete practices reveal a self-awareness of their existence in the world as part of an institution.'⁶⁴

For Wegner, utopian literature can thus be seen to transcend national cultures and historical conditions. However, while Wegner's focus is on transnational utopias, the real (and nuanced) political and historical circumstances of Wales warrant careful attention. While a transnational reading of literary utopias may reveal connections across a variety of 'periodizations', this requires a narrow definition of utopian writing that would obscure the discussion of utopias in this chapter, which is devoted explicitly to utopian writing that arises out of Wales's specific historical conditions. Literature that transcends (specious) boundaries between fiction and non-fiction, real and imaginary spaces, and the 'corresponding cultures' (*pace* M. Wynn Thomas) of Wales, as well as that which is

⁶³ Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*, p. 4.

⁶⁴ Wegner, *Imaginary Communities: Utopia, the Nation, and the Spatial Histories of Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 7-8.

impulsively utopian (to adapt Jameson's terminology), cannot be easily extricated (or *displaced*) from such context.

The utopian impulse is manifest in visions (representations) of a future, possibly independent Wales, but such visions vary in their practicality or resemblance to reality. Devolution as a political process is one that, even in the period following the Welsh 'No' vote in 1979, could not be described as an impossible utopian vision (given that Home Rule has been discussed in a variety of forms throughout the twentieth century). Nor can the movement for Welsh independence be dismissed as such, even as recent polling figures have placed support for independence at an all-time low.⁶⁵ Thus, literature that engages with the prospect of a Welsh sovereign state independent from the United Kingdom is not *de facto* utopian (in the pejorative sense of the term), especially given that the precedent set by the Scottish Independence referendum indicates that structurally such a change in the construction of the UK is eminently possible. Instead, we might suggest that Morris is a kind of utopian nationalist who envisions Wales gaining its independence in a variety of historical, contemporary, and futuristic circumstances. In *Hav*, this utopian thinking extends beyond the borders of Wales and into an imaginary nation, but one whose geography and history closely resembles that of Wales. It is 'covert' Welsh utopianism (to use Jameson's term), in that it is a utopia that arises – at least partially, I would argue – from Morris's Welsh patriotism, but is not set in Wales.

⁶⁵ 'Record low' back Welsh independence - BBC/ICM poll', *BBC News* 24 September 2014 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-29331475>. Recent polling tends to report support for independence in Wales between 6% and 16% <<http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/support-welsh-independence-boosted-scottish-7773741>>

However, wary that such binaries between the realistic and purely imaginary utopias might require a problematic distinction between the 'authentic and the inauthentic', Jameson prefers 'to stage the distinction in more spatial terms. In that case, the properly Utopian program or realization will involve a commitment to closure (and thereby to totality).'⁶⁶ The closure of the system indicates a separation of the utopian society from a larger, invariably more complex whole. This can be problematic for *realistic* fictional Welsh utopias, given that the texts on which this argument will focus are predominantly resistant to the spatial closure identified by Jameson. For instance, Morris doesn't imagine a version of Wales that no longer shares a land border with England, thus Wales itself doesn't aspire to become a closed system such as that of More's *Utopia*. Wales's geographical location prevents the kind of literal closure that Jameson's definition requires, given that it remains a peninsula that shares a lengthy border with England (which is often depicted by Morris as a colonial oppressor). *Hav*, on the other hand, describes a closed system in which the utopian state can thrive without any unwelcome outside influence. The imaginary geography of Morris's *Hav* is thus able to explore the consequences of a utopian totality. Although it is a peninsula connected to Europe, transport between Hav and the mainland is severed rather in the same manner as More's *Utopia*, which is itself the contingent on an alteration to its geography:

Utopus, who conquered the country and gave it his name (for it had previously been called Abraxa), and who brought its rude, uncouth inhabitants to such a high level of culture and humanity that they now surpass almost every other people, also changed its geography. After winning the victory at his first assault, he had a channel

⁶⁶ *Archaeologies of the Future*, p.4.

cut fifteen miles wide where the land joined the continent, and thus caused the sea to flow around the country.⁶⁷

The border of Hav is viable because it is largely impassable (like Utopus's trench). Morris's utopian vision of Wales in *A Machynlleth Triad* is thus restricted by the geographical reality of Wales and its border with England, and thereby cannot create such a totality. Consequently, *A Machynlleth Triad* prioritises its function (as an argument for the viability of an independent Welsh Republic) over its form (it does not conform to the style of the traditional Utopian genre). For example, it not does explicitly address how contemporary Wales might mitigate the impact of incomers into both its majority and minority Welsh-speaking areas. Hence, Morris's linguistic utopia offers little in the way of practical solutions, but attempts to demonstrate the benefits of a closed border, even if in a Welsh context it remains a 'pipedream'.

In short, the England-Wales border provides a challenge to writers of Welsh utopias whose fictions depend upon an independent Welsh government entirely free of English influence. In creating a utopia in the Welsh landscape, a writer must address the issue of the border. There are some examples of such a geographical change in Welsh fiction. A contemporary example of this might be found in Lloyd Jones's novel *Water*, in which Wales's physical geography is changed in a manner that has uncanny similarities to More's *Utopia*, as areas of Wales become flooded, thus separating various communities from one another.⁶⁸ An earlier twentieth-century example is the novel *Pe Symudai y Ddaear* ('If the earth were to

⁶⁷ Thomas More, *Utopia*, George M. Logan, Robert M. Adams, eds., trans. Robert M. Adams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 42.

⁶⁸ Lloyd Jones, *Water* (Talybont: Y Lolfa, 2014).

move') by D. Griffiths Jones, in which the physical geography of Wales is altered by violent storms and earthquakes, which are instigated as a form of divine retribution for a perceived failure of the Flintshire Eisteddfod to uphold the festival's Welsh-language rule. Prior to the transformative geological event that literally separates Wales from the rest of the United Kingdom, a character remarks (in response to the suggestion that Wales is entitled to political freedom): 'If the Lord had intended for Wales to be apart from England, he would have arranged the geography of these isles differently'.⁶⁹ Although these novels are not utopian, their treatment of the border points toward a way in which such a utopian totality might be achieved.

Welsh Writing: Political and Literary Utopias

Literary utopian visions of Wales throughout the twentieth century and at the beginning of the twenty-first century are scarce. Morris's utopian visions of Wales will necessarily be highly subjective – Johns refers to *Machynlleth Triad* as 'Jan's utopian future at any rate' – and lack the journalistic rigour of her examination of Trieste.⁷⁰ Morris writes as an advocate of Welsh independence, and as such her work displays a discernible utopian impulse. Arguably, the work of Malcolm Pryce and Niall Griffiths, two authors who were a part of the surge of interest in post-devolution Welsh writing, dystopianise Welsh locations. Pryce's noir-ish *Aberystwyth* novels feature an alternate version of the town run by cartels (a town

⁶⁹ D. Griffith Jones, *Pe Symudai y Ddaear* (Abercynon: Cwmni'r Cyhoeddiadau Modern Cymreig, 1964), p. 17. Miriam Elin Jones, a researcher in the Department of Welsh and Celtic Studies (Aberystwyth University), alerted me to Jones's novel, and kindly granted permission for the use of her translation of the quotation above in this thesis (as well as providing a helpful synopsis of the events of the novel).

⁷⁰ Johns, *Ariel*, p. 178

that, in reality, has a remarkably low crime rate), and Griffiths's Aberystwyth in *Grits* is arguably dystopian.⁷¹ Thus, in contrast to the discernible utopian impulse in Morris's work, her turn of the century London-published Welsh contemporaries evoke a more dystopian image of Wales at the turn of the century. There is an absence in Welsh literature in either language of traditional literary utopian visions of Wales. The most renowned, Islwyn Ffowc Elis's *Wythnos yng Nghymru Fydd* (A Week in Future Wales, 1957) is the most significant example of a modern Welsh literary utopia.⁷² In the novel, the protagonist Ifan Powel is transported (by time-machine) to two future versions of Wales. The first is an archetypal literary utopia; a fully bilingual, progressive Wales 'built', argues Robin Chapman, 'in the image of Plaid's ten policy points of 1933', of which Chapman notes sardonically 'even the football at Ninian Park [Cardiff City FC's former football ground, from which the club moved in 2009] is worth watching.'⁷³ The second version is a dystopian vision, in which Wales is now known as Western England, 'a nightmare of urban decay, mob rule and bureaucracy', according to Chapman.⁷⁴ *Wythnos* was essentially written as propaganda, Ffowc Elis himself considered it 'a story not fit to be treated as literature', while Chapman echoes the criticism of Elis's mix of strict adherence to Plaid policy and utopia, writing that 'the utopian section

⁷¹ The recent S4C/BBC collaboration *Y Gwyll/Hinterland* also presents an apparently dystopian version of Aberystwyth. *Y Gwyll* (S4C, October 2013-present); *Hinterland* (BBC One Wales, January 2014-present). Produced by Fiction Factory Films. Source for funding information: 'Aberystwyth police drama *Hinterland*'s economy boost', *BBC News*, 24 December 2012 <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-mid-wales-20820766>>

⁷² There are folkloric examples of utopias, such as 'Plant Rhys Dwfn' ('Children of Rhys the Deep'), cited in John Rhys' *Celtic Folklore: Welsh and Manx volume 1* (London: Wildwood House, 1980), in which a community lives off the coast in Cardigan Bay, protected from sight and invasion by a border of 'strange herbs'. See *Celtic Folklore*, p. 158-9.

⁷³ Robin T. Chapman, *Islwyn Ffowc Elis* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), p. 46, p. 45. They also play a kind of 'magnetic football'. See Craig Owen Jones, "'Magnifique, n'est-ce pas?": Representations of Wales and the world in Islwyn Ffowc Elis's *Wythnos Yng Nghymru Fydd*", *Almanac: Yearbook of Welsh Writing in English*, 13 (2008-9), pp. 162-190, 168.

⁷⁴ Chapman, p. 45.

[...] is so worthy and dull. Who would really want to live there?’⁷⁵ Chapman’s observation of Elis’s utopia is particularly resonant when considering Morris’s utopian visions of Wales.

Elis’s utopian Wales was overtly politically motivated (it was published by Plaid Cymru). The novel, Craig Owen Jones writes, incorporated ‘elements of nationalist policy, [...] especially Plaid Cymru’s eagerness to consider Wales as a discrete entity in relation to international affairs’.⁷⁶ Of the scientist who creates the time machine in the novel, Jones notes:

[B]y 1953 a large proportion of Germany’s foremost scientists were either dead, retired, or working in America or the Soviet Union [which] makes Doctor Heinkel’s presence in Wales anachronistic. [...] It is true that, strictly speaking, the inclusion of an American or English professor instead of a German one would have been more believable. [...] None of these solutions, however, would have contributed to the propaganda value of the book.⁷⁷

Wythnos’s usefulness as propaganda is enhanced by making the inventor of the time machine, however improbably, German (as opposed to English). For Elis, the utopian future Wales could not be seen to be dependent on English ingenuity. Jones argues that the credibility of Elis’s, and thus Plaid’s, vision of a Welsh utopia is dependent upon ‘the conceptualisation of Wales as an entity distinct from England’ (although this requires no

⁷⁵ Ffowc Elis, quoted in Chapman, p. 46. Chapman, p. 47.

⁷⁶ Craig Owen Jones, “‘Magnifique, n’est-ce pas?’: Representations of Wales and the world in Islwyn Ffowc Elis’s *Wythnos Yng Nghymru Fydd*”, pp. 166-7.

⁷⁷ Jones, ‘Magnifique, n’est-ce pas?’, p. 167.

such narrative event as a storm, flood, or earthquake).⁷⁸ This is a crucial difference between two competing notions of Welsh utopias. The mid-twentieth-century internationalist nationalism of Plaid Cymru stands in direct contrast to Eric Gill's rural utopian project in Capel y Ffin (which will be discussed in relation to Iain Sinclair's *Landor's Tower* in the following chapter) and its colonialist overtones, and the difference between the 'generating society' of each utopia. Gill's utopian commune, for example, was one populated almost exclusively by incomers from London, and was thus an attempt to create a utopian community in the Welsh landscape (with little regard for Welsh culture).⁷⁹ Elis's utopia is an attempt to create a utopia in the Welsh landscape, but one that is fundamentally connected to the culture in which it was created. In Levitas's terms, we might constitute the difference between the two utopian visions as one that lays bare the differences between the generating societies (London and Wales).

What perhaps sets Morris's utopian visions of Wales apart from utopian writing more generally is that what is often presented is that much rarer variety: the conservative utopia. Morris's visions of Wales eschew the technological advances present in Ffowc Elis's novel (that are themselves as much a result of the accoutrements of twentieth-century science fiction, as anything particularly significant themselves). Instead, Morris looks to reaffirm and even redefine a historic culture rather than create a new idealised version. Morris's utopian Wales prioritises simplicity over technological advancements, and its echoes of R.S. Thomas's utopian 'Abercuawg' are elaborated upon by Morris:

⁷⁸ Jones, 'Magnifique, n'est-ce pas?', p. 167.

⁷⁹ For more information on Jones and Gill's move to Capel-y-ffin, see Jonathan Miles, *Eric Gill & David Jones at Capel-y-ffin* (Bridgend: Seren, 1992).

Happily this year [the Welsh National Eisteddfod] has coincided with a sensational event in Welsh political history, the emergence of a dramatically new coalition government in the Welsh assembly at Cardiff – which is to say, for an incorrigible romantic like me, a potent step on the road to Abercuawg.⁸⁰

Morris herself has written of her politics, writing that: ‘I must declare my own interest. I am an old-school Welsh Euro-Utopian. I stand for a simple independent Wales embodied within a confederal Europe, and honouring above all its own customs, traditions and interests.’⁸¹ Morris’s embrace of the independent, pro-European stance reflects Plaid Cymru’s official position, which Wyn Jones delineates as follows:

Plaid Cymru is now formally committed to campaigning for an independent Wales that is a full member state of the European Union [...] Plaid Cymru has clearly decided that ‘independence’ is – ultimately at least – both more defensible and easier to ‘sell’ to a still sceptical Welsh public’.⁸²

Visions of Wales such as those of Morris raise interesting issues. This is not necessarily an issue of propaganda (which is how Ffowc Elis came to regard his novel, and clearly not how Morris’s work is intended), but the intertextuality of political manifestos and literature, and the detectable presence of the former within the latter.

⁸⁰ Jan Morris, ‘The cuckoos are stirring, and our nation may at last achieve serenity’, *The Guardian*, 6 August 2007

<<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2007/aug/06/comment.politics2>>

⁸¹ Jan Morris, ‘The cuckoos are stirring, and our nation may at last achieve serenity’.

⁸² Richard Wyn Jones, ‘From Utopia to Reality: Plaid Cymru and Europe’, p. 141.

Morris's vision of Wales is independent but within a confederal Europe, which either requires a more elastic definition of confederal or a redefinition of the European Union as it currently stands (there is no formal definition of the EU, and it has elements of both a federation and a confederation). The prioritisation of Wales's 'own customs, traditions and interests' is perhaps more problematic to Morris's definition of a Welsh utopia, given that such categories would differ significantly between different geographical regions of Wales. Raymond Williams recognised the problematic nature of Welsh Euro-Utopianism, such as that of Morris:

The moment when we move from a merely retrospective nationalist politics to a truly prospective politics, we begin that affirmative thinking which some of the most developed and intelligent left politics in certain other centres of Europe has truly lost [...] [This European politics] has lost something at its heart which is recognised again and again by those who are inside it: the sense of what any of this liberation is for, the sense of what the struggle would be able to attain, the sense of what human life would be, other than merely Utopian rhetoric, which is the object of all the preoccupied conflict and struggle and argument.⁸³

In Morris's utopian vision, Wales is part of a confederal Europe that preserves the culture of its smaller nations, in contrast to the more malign forces (in Morris's view) of Anglicisation and Americanisation (and their concomitant economic neoliberalism: 'the game-show-and-

⁸³ Raymond Williams, 'The Importance of Community', *Who Speaks for Wales*, p. 185.

lottery civilisation’).⁸⁴ Williams, however, is wary of the utopianism of the European project and Wales’s place within it.⁸⁵ Morris envisions a sovereign Wales whose only dealings with England are within a confederal Europe. This differs significantly from Ffowc Elis’s novel, which presents the continued relationship with England as ambiguous. As Jones notes: ‘Wales’s future relationship with England remains an issue even in the utopian vision’.⁸⁶

Machynlleth: Capital of Utopian Wales

One of Morris’s more specifically utopian experiments, in *A Machynlleth Triad*, provides an alternate history (set during Owain Glyndŵr’s revolution), a contemporary ‘realistic’ travelogue in Machynlleth, and an alternative future that is contingent on Morris’s idiosyncratic version of Glyndŵr’s revolution.⁸⁷ Morris’s alternate history is one of several recent alternate Welsh histories. Perhaps the most renowned is Owen Sheers’s *Resistance* (2007), which imagines a successful German invasion of Wales and its potential impact on a border community in the Ewyras valley.⁸⁸ The inclusion of *A Machynlleth Triad* in this discussion is admittedly problematic, given that it was published several years prior to the devolution referendum in 1997 that resulted in the creation of the National Assembly for

⁸⁴ Morris writes, ‘To most foreigners, I fear, the culture of Wales today is almost indistinguishable from the culture of England – or for that matter from the culture of the United States of America’, in ‘As Others See Us’. The latter quotation is from Jan Morris, ‘With God where the cuckoos sing’, *The Independent*, 23 November 1996
<<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/with-god-where-the-cuckoos-sing-1353708.html>>

⁸⁵ It is important to note Williams’s pejorative usage of the term ‘utopian’, equating it with rhetoric rather than meaningful political action.

⁸⁶ Jones, ‘Magnifique, n’est-ce pas?’, p. 171. Such visions of a more expansive confederal Europe are perhaps increasingly relevant following the result of the UK referendum on membership of the EU.

⁸⁷ *A Machynlleth Triad* (London: Penguin, 1995).

⁸⁸ Owen Sheers, *Resistance* (London: Faber and Faber, 2007).

Wales. However, it provides a useful account of Wales immediately prior to devolution, even referring to the formation of the National Assembly for Wales (looking back from the confusing perspective of a futuristic utopian vision of an independent Wales). The account is divided into three sections: an embellished historical account of Owain Glyndŵr's first Welsh parliament, a contemporary account of present-day Machynlleth (in 1993), and a vision of a future independent Wales. The final section takes place several years after an aborted attempt at the establishment of a Westminster-sanctioned National Assembly for Wales (like that accidentally described by Johns) – in which Machynlleth is the new capital. The first section revises the circumstances of Glyndŵr's revolution, resulting in a vision of Wales that is pre-Saxon (but post-Roman). This creates the somewhat problematic situation in which the futuristic utopia is contingent on a reengineering of historical events, undercutting the political resonance of Morris's Machynlleth utopia as an achievable political aim (the narrative contains nothing like Ffowc Elis's time machine).

As suggested above, *A Machynlleth Triad* is prescient in its prediction of devolution. Writing from the perspective of an imagined futuristic independent Wales for which Machynlleth serves as its capital, Morris recalls/predicts:

In the days of the United Kingdom the pseudo-capital of Wales was Cardiff, Caerdydd, supplied under British auspices with an ornate formal centre of government. After independence the Welsh determined that their new capital, like the republic itself, would contain nothing so grandiose: it would be above all

unassuming, merely a gentle adaptation of the small town which had been for so long, geographically at least, a symbolical focus of Wales.⁸⁹

In *Wales*, Morris chastises the grandiosity of Wales's presumptive capital Cardiff, writing: 'Bright, brash, profitable, clever and cosmopolitan though it is, Cardiff is weak on presence'.⁹⁰ For Morris, Cardiff is an unsatisfactory symbol for her vision of a utopian Wales. The publication of *A Machynlleth Triad* predates the devolution referendum and the building of the Senedd in Cardiff by four and ten years respectively. However, the regeneration of Cardiff Bay (discussed in chapter six) was already well underway at the time of publication. Nonetheless, Morris's prediction of an 'ornate centre of government' in Cardiff, operating under the auspices of the British government is accurate. Also, while there is currently no separate Welsh Republic with its governmental centre in Machynlleth (Queen Elizabeth remains head of state, in contrast to the Welsh Republic envisioned by Morris), Morris's insistence on independence over devolution is undimmed.⁹¹ In a recent article for the Institute of Welsh Affairs, Morris reinforces the idea of a hypothetical decentralised government in another projected future independent Wales: 'The unfortunate false start at Cardiff Bay has long been abandoned. It's now called New Tiger Bay, and all the buildings there are profitably devoted to finance, commerce, tourism, culture, entertainment and good food, with the former Assembly building converted into a national Stock Exchange-cum-casino.'⁹² In *A Machynlleth Triad's* utopian section, Morris

⁸⁹ *A Machynlleth Triad* (London: Penguin, 1995), p. 65.

⁹⁰ *Wales: Epic Views of a Small Country*, p. 334.

⁹¹ The theme of Republicanism would be explored in more depth by Morris in *The Princesship of Wales* (1995).

⁹² Jan Morris, 'Simplicity will be mantra of the new Wales', *Click on Wales*, 27 April 2014 <<http://www.clickonwales.org/2014/04/simplicity-will-be-mantra-of-the-new-wales/>>

writes that: 'Welsh immigration laws are tough because there are strict entry quotas – numerical, professional, ethnic, and of age'.⁹³ That Morris's independent Welsh utopia has proscriptive restrictions on immigration numbers is perhaps understandable, given Morris's outspoken criticism of English incomers. The 'ethnic' quotas are more problematic, and although *A Machynlleth Triad* is ostensibly fiction, Morris's has already stated the benefits of ethnic cohesion in her essay on Patagonia. The utopian Machynlleth is not entirely free of industrial technology. The steel and coal industry thrive in the new Welsh Republic, largely because fears over climate change have proved to be unfounded, 'despite wild claims to the contrary by over-zealous propagandists' (*A Machynlleth Triad*, p. 82).

Of her futuristic vision of Wales in *A Machynlleth Triad*, Morris writes:

The susceptible visitor, the relieved diplomat lately posted here from Burundi or El Salvador, may feel Wales to be a kind of Utopia: a country that is still itself, a country of family size, as it were, its historical aspirations achieved at last, at peace with its neighbours, enthusiastically European, respected and influential in its associations, basing its affairs upon a Declaration of Principles that is universally admired and envied.' *A Machynlleth Triad*, p. 72.

⁹³ *A Machynlleth Triad*, p.76. Also, there may be a tendency to describe immigration as a wholly bicultural (English/Welsh) phenomenon, and ignore immigration from outside of the UK. Charlotte Williams explores this issue in greater depth in 'Claiming the National: Nation, National Identity and Ethnic Minorities, in *A Tolerant Nation? Revisiting Ethnic Diversity in a Devolved Wales*, eds. Charlotte Williams, Neil Evans and Paul O'Leary (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2003), pp. 220 – 234.

There are several potential contradictions and qualifications in Morris's description of Wales as a utopia. First, that in order to perceive Wales as a utopia, a visitor would need to be susceptible, which appears to be a self-deprecating recognition of Morris's own tendency to romanticise Wales and the places she has visited throughout her career. Second, there is a certain pointedness in Morris's description of the hypothetical diplomats as arriving from countries that both experienced civil war at various points in their recent (twentieth-century) history, and for an experienced and knowledgeable traveller such as Morris this would suggest a qualification to her Welsh utopia. Third, that the Utopian Wales above is only a partial utopia ('kind of'), one that retains both respect and influence, and is at peace with its neighbour, England. The hypothetical visiting diplomats from El Salvador and Burundi might wonder what it is specifically about this 'kind of' utopian Wales that makes it desirable, when there is so little discernible detail in its description (which is particularly stark when compared to Morris's *Hav*).

The return to, or preservation of, an ancient ancestral civilisation is a major theme in Morris's utopian vision of Wales in *A Machynlleth Triad* (the third section of the book), in which she suggests that the legitimacy of a Welsh Republic would be predicated on a new 'Recitation of History', said to be translated by Roy Jenkins:

The Recitation begins with the proposition that Wales, uniquely among the nations, was a trustee of ancient Rome: only in this small corner of Europe was the civilizing presence of Rome never overlaid by heathen barbarism – no Saxons, Jutes or Angles

ever conquered Wales, and here Christianity was never extinguished. It is upon this fact, the Recitation suggests, that the whole character of Wales has depended.⁹⁴

This fictional Recitation reconstitutes Wales' history of occupation. Ignoring the conquering by the *Saeson*, Morris creates a world in which the new version of events is recited (presumably at every level of society), engendering a kind of forced collective patriotism. This patriotism effectively pledges allegiance to the Roman Empire (or the memory of it), and is contingent upon the argument that the Romans were a civilising force, and all other incomers 'heathens'. In effect, it is a replacement of the colonising force of the English/Saeson with the Romans (and Christianity). Phillips's suggestion that Morris's focus on travel that is 'structured by imperial binaries – including geographical centres and margins – may reproduce subjectivities that are structured around related binaries – including masculine/feminine, white/black, and so on', seems especially pertinent here.⁹⁵ Morris's new *Machynlleth* is an imaginative geography in that it emphasises a temporal distance (an imagined future) rather than a spatial shift (the fictional, albeit plausible Mediterranean peninsula of *Hav*), but crucially the motif of Wales as a colony is prevalent (even celebrated). Morris's imagined Welsh Republic is still configured in distinctly colonial terms.

Our First Leader and a New Landsker

⁹⁴ *Machynlleth Triad*, p. 87.

⁹⁵ Phillips, p. 15

While *A Machynlleth Triad* alters events in Medieval Welsh history to explore a new Wales based upon a successful revolution and embrace of the civilising force of the Roman Empire, *Our First Leader* casts its attention toward twentieth-century Wales and the potential effect of a successful German invasion of the UK. Morris's first piece of fiction after devolution, the novel imagines a successful German invasion (during the Second World War) as an unintentional catalyst for Welsh emancipation from England. Part alternate history, part satire, it imagines a Wales paradoxically emancipated and occupied by invading German forces. While Owen Sheers's *Resistance* is perhaps the most renowned Welsh alternate history of the Second World War, the two texts bear little resemblance to one another, especially in their treatment of the occupying forces. Where *Resistance* humanises the German soldiers (primarily through the character Captain Albrecht Wolfram), but ultimately rejects their presence, *Our First Leader* casts the German invasion as a necessary evil to rid Wales of English influence (although through distinctly more extreme means than in *A Machynlleth Triad*).⁹⁶ Where Sheers's *Resistance* projects a mostly bucolic fantasy of Welsh rural life interrupted by war (and even hints at potential romance between the two main characters, Sarah and Albrecht), *Our First Leader* imagines a Wales (referred to by the occupying forces as the 'Welsh Dimension') in which non-Welsh identifying citizens are sent to concentration camps.⁹⁷ As a piece of satire, *Our First Leader* initially targets the pompous (fictional) Oxford-based Welsh academic Dr Parry-Morris, who is described as 'one of the most public of Welsh nationalists [...] who thought of himself of the spokesman for his country' (*Our First Leader*, pp. 9-10). After acquiescing to the demands of the Führer, Parry-Morris 'was left to pursue his own work (a pamphlet about the effects of metrical psalmody

⁹⁶ Owen Sheers, *Resistance*.

⁹⁷ *Our First Leader*, p. 20.

upon the northern Welsh folk-narratives, and a contribution to the new Oxford Companion to Celtic Dialectic' (*Our First Leader*, p. 20). Meanwhile, a mass deportation of English incomers takes place:

[...] compulsory movement orders were delivered to all those many residents of Wales who had declared themselves English in the recent census: families were instructed to report to Machynlleth, more or less the central town of Wales, for special trains that would take them to relocation areas in England. This was called popular readjustment [and was designed to] keep the indigenes in a condition of bewildered apprehension [...]. (*Our First Leader*, p. 21)

It is later noted that 'the movement of a few hundred thousand people out of Wales went generally unnoticed'.⁹⁸ The pun on 'popular' is jarring in the above passage, and this mass deportation is not particularly elaborated on in the rest of the text (and seems to have little effect on those who remain). The reference to an indigenous population charges the narrative with an ethnic boundary, rather than cultural difference. The notices placed by the occupying forces informing the remaining population of new laws are transcribed (by Parry-Morris himself) directly into Welsh, suggesting that any remaining Welsh monolinguals will at some point fall foul of laws that they can't read.

⁹⁸ *Our First Leader*, p. 21.

Furthermore, the borders of 'Cymru Newydd' (New Wales) are redrawn to an area of a 'thousand-odd square miles'.⁹⁹ It is described in the following discussion between Dr Parry-Morris and 'Herr Gauleiter':

'[W]e have decided that the Welsh nation shall consist entirely of those who have declared themselves to be Welsh'

'*Da iawn*', said Parry-Morris. 'Excellent.'

Next there was the matter of Homeland territory. It would be impractical, the Gauleiter said, simply to make the whole of Wales separate from the start. The industrialized south of the country, and the north-east, was so heavily Anglicized that for the moment at least it would be excluded [...] A new border would, in effect, create a Wales that was compact, rural, uncrowded and inhabited overwhelmingly still by Welsh people, most of them Welsh-speaking. It would include three small market towns – Machynlleth, Dolgellau and Llanidloes (although the Gauleiter had some difficulty in pronouncing them) – besides the mountainous area called Eryri. [...] [A]ll those who had registered themselves as Welsh would be encouraged to move, and from it all English people would be induced to emigrate.

'*Bendigedig*,' said Parry-Morris, 'a blessed solution for which we have long been working.'¹⁰⁰

Although mostly satirical (the echo of the 'Final solution' in 'blessed solution' in the final line make this abundantly clear), there is an acknowledgment that the aims of Parry-Morris (an

⁹⁹ *Our First Leader*, p. 22.

¹⁰⁰ *Our First Leader*, p. 16.

otherwise plausible Oxford professor and Welsh nationalist), and the Gauleiter are aligned. It is not only English-identifying citizens that are removed, but the redrawn border will separate the 'Anglicized' regions in the south and north East from a region that is more culturally Welsh, one in which the ability to speak Welsh acts as a kind a passport to Cymru Newydd. While in theory this is an extreme measure (and a decision made under the duress of occupation by a potentially hostile force), the new border nonetheless addresses the permeability of the current border without resorting to earthquakes or floods.

From a geographical perspective, the new border is interesting. Rather than using the mountains of Eryri (Snowdonia) as a natural border (or Offa's Dyke as a historical one), it appears to take the A470 (the road that links north and south Wales) as its starting point. Both Dolgellau and Llanidloes are bisected by the A470 (in Morris's text explicitly designed to divide Wales's 'Englishry' and its 'Welshry'), although it wasn't built in its modern form until 1970. Machynlleth lies roughly five miles to the west. In a modern context, the new border of Cymru Newydd is linguistically complex. In the data of the 2001 census (the year after the publication of *Our First Leader*), Dolgellau and Machynlleth both reported majority Welsh-speaking populations (70.55% and 55.11% respectively), whereas Llanidloes reported 17.88%.¹⁰¹ Clearly such a border is contingent on Morris's rewritten mid-twentieth-century historical events, when such places would have been populated with a higher proportion of Welsh-speakers. Here, Utopus's trench is recast as a linguistic border designed to keep out incomers, and again it echoes Thomas's Abercuawg. *Our First Leader* takes a more extreme position than that of *A Machynlleth Triad*. Where the latter retains Cardiff as a necessary, if

¹⁰¹ Office for National Statistics, *Census 2001, Report on the Welsh language*. Available at <www.statistics.gov.uk>

unloved, financial sector in Wales and establishes Machynlleth ‘the administrative capital of Cymru Newydd’, the former separates Cardiff from Wales entirely.¹⁰² This geographical realignment is intrinsic to Morris’s definition of Welshness. In a review of a biography of R.S. Thomas, she uncompromisingly lays out her frustration at the continuing process of Anglicisation:

Ours is a place of constant torment, torn by doubt. Is it necessary to speak Welsh to be properly Welsh? When is violence, or even unpleasantness, justified to protect Welshness? Is it racist to want to keep English people out, when they are perverting the national character? Should we aim at an entirely Welsh-speaking enclave in the north-west, and let the rest go hang?¹⁰³

Channelling R.S. Thomas, Morris poses rhetorical questions that, it would seem, offer little in the way of ‘doubt’.¹⁰⁴ Where she suggests that English incomers are perverting the national character, it is only the national character from Morris’s perspective (from her position in the ‘reactionary’ north-west Wales). The anti-English sentiment is echoed elsewhere by Morris when she writes that ‘[Thomas] detests the vowel-sounds of Birmingham immigrants, and so do we’.¹⁰⁵ However, it is perhaps none more so evident than in *Our First Leader*, and the suggestion of aiming for a Welsh-speaking enclave in the

¹⁰² *Our First Leader*, p. 31.

¹⁰³ Jan Morris, ‘With God where the cuckoos sing’, *The Independent*, 23 November 1996 <<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/with-god-where-the-cuckoos-sing-1353708.html>>

¹⁰⁴ The article cited from is ostensibly a review of Justin Wintle’s *Furious Interiors: Wales, R S Thomas and God* (London: Harper Collins, 1996).

¹⁰⁵ Jan Morris, ‘With God where the cuckoos sing’.

north-west not only echoes Cymru Newydd, but also Morris's oft-repeated authorial blurb: '[Jan] lives with her partner Elizabeth Morris in the top left-hand corner of Wales'.¹⁰⁶

Parry-Morris is appointed (not elected) as the leader of a new Wales in which the process of bilingualism is abandoned (and the English-speaking areas along with it). In doing so he helps to establish what is effectively a new rule of law, based upon a new constitution for the so-called 'Welsh Dimension'. The first order from the new government is directed to Welsh people living beyond the new border, and is translated into Welsh by Parry-Morris:

Under the terms of the Welsh Dimension, ordered by our beloved Führer, each one of you is entitled to a free return [...] There you will be enabled to live according to the true traditions of your ancestors, liberated at last from English oppression. Failure to comply with this invitation is punishable by Protectorate Law 2607

'Aros mae'r mynyddau mawr

Rhuo trostynt mae y gwynt

Clywir eto gyda'r wawr

*Gân bugeiliaid megis cynt...*¹⁰⁷

The poem (which is not translated or identified in *Our First Leader*), was quoted again by Morris two years later (in English), in *A Writer's House in Wales*.

¹⁰⁶ See, for example, *Hav*.

¹⁰⁷ *Our First Leader*, p. 23.

The best known of all Welsh lyrics, by the Victorian railway-man poet John Ceiriog Hughes, celebrates the reassurance of the mountains:

*The mighty mountains never stand,
Tireless the winds across them blow;
The shepherds' song across the land
Sounds with the dawn as long ago*

For centuries the mountains offered the Welsh people refuge from the encroaching Power to the east, and thus became emblems of refuge in a wider kind.¹⁰⁸

The natural geographical border of the mountains is thus placed at odds with the cultural linguistic border of Cymru Newydd. Llanidloes itself is doubly-exposed in this context. Not only does it not possess the strength in numbers of Welsh speakers as in Machynlleth and Dolgellau, but it also lacks the natural protection of the Cambrian Mountains (of which it lies exposed in the east). Dolgellau and Machynlleth are given greater natural protection by the Cambrians (in the south) and Snowdonia in the north.

Dealing with past and present in alternative history is fraught with potential difficulty. For example, is it more important to take note of census data contemporaneous to the publication, or the data at the time of historical event in question?¹⁰⁹ However, Morris makes it clear that *Our First Leader* is a response to devolution and its effect on Wales. Morris includes a 'Realist's Epilogue', in which she writes:

¹⁰⁸ *A Writer's House in Wales*, p. 17.

¹⁰⁹ The latter of which would be redundant in the case of *Our First Leader*, given that the altered events occur prior to the events of the novel (so the data would be redundant).

In one way, though, the fable is still developing its own truths. After 800 years of impotence, Wales has at last gained a measure of self-government from England – a very small measure of self-government, a derisory and impertinent measure the Llyw [Parry-Morris] would say [...] One day, without a doubt, the little country will achieve the complete fulfilment that Parry-Morris envisaged for it.

[...] I like to think, though, that even outside the realm of fantasy there will always be room for such a champion as Parry-Morris.¹¹⁰

While links between Plaid Cymru and fascism are severely contested, the party has '[f]or decades', as Jasmine Donahaye points out, 'been slurred with allegations of fascism and antisemitism'.¹¹¹ Such insinuations about nationalist parties in the UK aren't uncommon. In his Scottish alternate history novel *Dominion* (2012), C.J. Sansom writes:

[The Scottish Nationalist Party of the 1930s] included elements sympathetic to fascism, but had no common policies on the serious issues of the day [...] beyond the dream, common to all nationalist and Fascist parties throughout Europe, that the expression of nationhood would release some sort of mythical 'national spirit' that would somehow resolve all problems.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ *Our First Leader*, pp. 135-6.

¹¹¹ Richard Wyn Jones discusses this at length in *The Fascist Party in Wales? Plaid Cymru, Welsh Nationalism and the Accusation of Fascism* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2014). Jasmine Donahaye, 'When Welsh nationalism was smeared with fascism', *Click on Wales: Institute of Welsh Affairs*, 11 October 2013 <<http://www.iwa.wales/click/2013/10/when-welsh-nationalism-was-smeared-with-fascism/>>

¹¹² C.J. Sansom, 'Historical Note', *Dominion* (London: Mantle, 2012), p.586.

Published at a time of fierce debate surrounding Scottish independence (although pre-independence referendum rather than Morris's post-referendum), Sansom's novel contains some significant parallels with Morris's short satire, mostly in the nationalist tolerance for fascism in return for 'vague promises of autonomy or independence'.¹¹³ 'The suggestion that Scots Nats have enthusiastically signed up to the Hitler agenda', as Mark Lawson writes, would have made some Scottish readers 'gasp'.¹¹⁴ Nonetheless, the fact that both Morris and Sansom explore German occupation and its effect on the national parties of Wales and Scotland respectively suggests that such insinuations continue to follow nationalist politics. While nationalism doesn't necessarily connote advocacy for separatist politics, Morris's fiction (whether utopian or alternate history) provides a framework within in which the consequences of devolution (and the circumstances that might be required to bring about independence) can be explored and reimaged. While devolution is a political reality in Wales, the question of the further separation and political autonomy attained prominence in the UK media during the recent independence referendum in Scotland in 2014. Morris herself sees a connection between the two movements, writing that: 'I'm a romantic and I have a romantic approach to politics, and Scotland, like Wales, is such a wonderful idea. And in my escapist way I ignore the economics and concentrate on the imaginative part of politics'.¹¹⁵ As such, this provides a more recent touchstone for a discussion of independence in Wales, given that instead of a negotiation of the devolution of further

¹¹³ *Dominion*, p. 587. In a further point of confluence between the two texts, Sansom cites Morris's *Pax Britannica* trilogy as an influence on his portrayal of the British 'empire in decline', *ibid.*, p. 574.

¹¹⁴ Mark Lawson, 'Dominion by CJ Sansom – review', *The Guardian*, 6 December 2012 <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/dec/06/dominion-cj-sansom-review>>

¹¹⁵ Jan Morris, in interview with Michael Prodger, 'Jan Morris: One last time to Venice', *The New Statesman*, 10 December 2014 <<http://www.newstatesman.com/2014/12/jan-morris-one-last-time-venice>>

powers from Westminster (as happened in both Wales and Scotland in 2011) there was a very real prospect of a fundamental change to traditional UK politics. Carwyn Jones (leader of Welsh Labour and First Minister of the National Assembly for Wales), raised the spectre of utopia during the Scottish Independence referendum campaign, during which he stated his support for the pro-union 'No' campaign in the following terms: 'As a Labour First Minister I'm here to say to the left in Scotland that the promise of a socialist utopia post-separation is a siren call from the Yes camp that must be resisted.'¹¹⁶ The political rhetoric of the pro-independence 'Yes' campaign in Scotland (the 'siren call') is countered here by Jones's own rhetoric (in the week prior to an event with huge constitutional implications for the United Kingdom). Jones's anti-utopian stance is configured in spatial terms, emphasising the spatiality of the change that would be instigated by independence. What frames Jones's argument is the relational difference between Welsh and Scottish conceptions of independence of devolution.¹¹⁷ This 'imaginative part of politics' gives an idea as to how the utopian impulse features in Morris's writing. Morris's 'imaginative politics' are reflected in her use of utopian tropes and frequent specific references to utopia, but her utopian visions of both a past and present Wales are liberated by disregarding the unfulfilling compromise that she considers devolution to be.

Trieste and the Meaning of Nowhere: Morris, Utopia, and Colonial Discourse

¹¹⁶ 'Scottish independence referendum: Carwyn Jones tells Scots to vote No for 'solidarity and justice'... and hails Welsh NHS as a reason to stay', *Wales Online*, 09 September 2014. <<http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/scottish-independence-referendum-carwyn-jones-7741897>>

¹¹⁷ The OED's primary definition of 'separation' is 'action of separating or parting, of setting or keeping apart another', *Oxford English Dictionary*, 'Separation', <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/176108>>

Published one year after *Our First Leader*, Morris's *Trieste* is neither a literary utopia nor alternate history. Where *Our First Leader* uses an ill-defined discussion of fascism to discuss the prospects for Welsh culture in the context of devolution, *Trieste* is Morris's attempt to discuss an (imperfect) allegory for Wales. Moving away from the matter of Wales (a movement that this chapter will now follow), Morris's text paradoxically describes a place that is both real and of her imagination. There is a distinct semantic connection between the 'nowhere' of the book's subtitle and utopia, a term whose etymology Thomas More derived from the Greek *ou* ('no') *topos* ('place'). For Morris, Trieste is a paradox: a place resonant with 'meaning' but, as Vera Rule observes in a review for *The Guardian*, 'a very particular nowhere-in-particular'.¹¹⁸ As such, Morris's text is a paean to a city that is not only 'nowhere', but as this section will argue, an idealised 'no place' akin to her utopian visions of Wales. Morris makes several rough comparisons between Wales and Trieste, not least between varying notions of what constitutes political and cultural independence.¹¹⁹ Returning to the city having previously visited as a soldier at the end of the Second World War, Morris observes that Trieste, to her, is an 'allegory of limbo'.¹²⁰ Later in the book, Morris addresses the concept of nowhere and utopia: 'Could all this be the true meaning of nowhere – this half-real, half-wishful Utopia?'¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Vera Rule, 'Eternal City', *The Guardian*, 20 October 2001, <<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2001/oct/20/travel.travelbooks>>

¹¹⁹ Trieste was formerly an important part of the Habsburg monarchy, and briefly gained independence between 1947-54, but subsequently became (and currently is) a territory belonging to Italy.

¹²⁰ *Trieste*, p. 7.

¹²¹ *Trieste*, p. 181. There is also a clear echo of (Morris's namesake) William Morris's *News from Nowhere: or, An Epoch of Rest: Being Some Chapters from a Utopian Romance* (London: Routledge, 1970).

In her first visit to Trieste (as James), Morris is a colonial English soldier, whereas her returns throughout the latter part of the twentieth century (culminating in the visit on which *Trieste* is based) see her eventually return as a Welsh republican and woman. As Morris writes in *Trieste*:

I thought it very odd when I was young and encountered the Trieste mélange of loyalties. I was a simple British patriot in those days – even Wales was subsumed in my idea of a benevolent and majestic British nation-state, benign suzerain of an unexampled empire, headed by a monarch everyone respected, led at that time by a charismatic champion, victorious as ever and destined to live happily ever after.¹²²

Importantly, Morris's own conception of national identity undergoes significant revision in between visits to Trieste. The evocation of pride in the monarchy and Winston Churchill in the quotation above is anathema to Morris's later writing, in which there is a palpable sense of antipathy toward both the monarchy and the Westminster government. *Trieste*, however, marks an important juncture in Morris's career, as it signifies a return to the long-form travel narrative (following some shorter fictional works). Just as I have argued in regard to *Landor's Tower*, *Trieste*, whether by intention or circumstance, can be read as a significant marker for Welsh writing in English after devolution. Morris's text espouses a romantic notion of Welshness (or as she frequently refers to it, *Cymreictod*) by exploring Trieste as politically and geographically analogous to Wales, and she points out, '[m]any a

¹²² *Trieste*, p. 103. Morris's transformation is made more stark given her initial attitude toward what she describes as the 'Welsh charlatans or Scottish hangers-on'. Quoted by Johns in *Ariel*, from a letter to Faber 'proposing a book on the English', (1957), p. 173.

Triestine dilemma has also been endemic in Wales'.¹²³ The key dilemma endemic to both Wales and Trieste is that of either accepting or contesting the sovereign power of another state and resistance to/compliance with colonial regimes. Both were occupied by the Roman Empire, although Morris attests to the civilising influence of Rome in Wales, she is more ambivalent about lasting Roman influence in Trieste (instead recognising the city as 'one of the great achievements of Habsburg imperialism').¹²⁴ Both Wales and Trieste share land borders with their former occupiers, and both places must continually assert their 'indigenous' culture in the face of modernity. Although Trieste is a city and Wales a country, they both have a lack of sovereignty in common. Discussion of such places has been commonplace in the devolution movement in Wales since the 1970s, none more so than *Planet* magazine, which in its earliest issues in the early part of the 1970s frequently featured writing and translations from both Basque and Breton writers.¹²⁵ It is a trend to which Morris returns in her introduction to a collected volume of *Planet* articles:

Not so long ago it seemed to Welsh patriots that they were almost unique in the world, their national predicament virtually unique, sustained only by the fitful and wistful good wishes of their fellow-Celts in Brittany, Ireland and Scotland, plus the odd Corsican or Croatian. Now it turns out, as one contributor to this book suggests,

¹²³ *Trieste*, p. 99.

¹²⁴ *Trieste*, p. 29.

¹²⁵ As Ned Thomas, the first editor of *Planet*, writes: 'So we salute the Czechs and the Anguilans and the Bretons and the Basques – there are degrees of oppression far worse than we know', in *The Welsh Extremist: Modern Welsh Politics, Literature and Society* (Talybont: Y Lolfa, 1994), p. 31.

This was also the case with Plaid publications in the 1950s and 60s. Richard Wyn Jones discusses D. J. Davies and his influence on Gwynfor Evans' leadership of the party between 1945 and 1981, 'draw[ing] [Evans'] attention to the successes of the Scandinavian social democracies', in 'From Utopia to Reality: Plaid Cymru and Europe', p. 135.

that Wales stands 'at the dead centre' of a congeries of similar countries, in analogous situations.¹²⁶

However, Morris doesn't only present Trieste's as an 'analogous situation' to that of Wales. There are indeed similarities, but Trieste's history of occupation – which is clearly drawn upon by Morris – is not presented as one of a singular dominant colonial force in the way that Morris presents the English occupation of Wales (for example in *Wales: Epic Views of a Small Country*).¹²⁷ Morris writes:

In Trieste more than anywhere the idea of nationality seems alien [...] I like to think it instinctively honours the playwright Saunders Lewis's Welsh criterion of true patriotism: *ysbrid hael ac o gariad at wareiddiad a thraddodiad a phetau goriau dynoliaeth* – 'a generous spirit of love for civilisation and tradition and the best things of mankind'.¹²⁸

While for Morris *Trieste* lacks tangible political connections to Wales, she uses it to reflect on her own notions of *Cymreictod*, and this is strengthened by Morris's insistence on contextualising Welsh cultural heritage within a wider European context (a subject I will return to when discussing *Hav* later in this chapter).¹²⁹ Saunders Lewis is not only a key figure of twentieth-century Welsh nationalism and the inception of the party of Wales, Plaid

¹²⁶ Jan Morris, in her introduction to *Compass Points*, p. 3.

¹²⁷ Jan Morris, *Wales: Epic Views of a Small Country*.

¹²⁸ *Trieste*, p. 116.

¹²⁹ See also: 'The territories of the Celts once extended from the Atlantic to the Black Sea, from Ireland and Spain to Turkey and Rumania, and similar tastes and attitudes are apparent wherever they have left their relics' p. viii. Jan Morris, foreword to Deborah Krasner, *Celtic: Living in Scotland, Ireland, and Wales* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990)

Cymru, but a looming figure in Morris's patriotism. Here Morris unambiguously aligns the twin 'dilemmas' of independence in both Wales and Trieste. As Morris writes, 'It was, in short, an existentialist Wales that we envisioned. Both of us [Morris and Lewis], in our different ways, set out to restore it if we could, to protect what was left of it.'¹³⁰ So, Morris is preoccupied with Wales in *Trieste*, but it is a personal connection made between two places with a history of contested sovereignty, and the desire to restore and protect aspects of their culture, rather than a discussion of a directly analogous political situation. This is an important difference, as instead of simply drawing parallels of geography (and to a lesser extent, politics) between Trieste and Wales, Morris offers a reflection on a particular, contested, space as a way to explore her own personal negotiation of power and transition. Indeed, she refers to Trieste as 'a place of transience' (*Trieste*, p. 186). It is through this overtly subjective exploration of geographical space that Morris creates her layered cartography, overlaying a distinctly Welsh narrative onto Trieste. Occasionally this is achieved by the inclusion of seemingly erroneous details and coincidences, such as when Morris describes the Trieste municipal guard, the '*paretti*', as 'rather like the officers of the Monmouthshire Special Constabulary, among whom my bearded maternal grandfather posed with equal firmness at about the same time'.¹³¹ Morris recalls upon hearing Puccini, that '[T]he same angelic interlude that visited me at home in Wales seems to have reached Trieste too' (*Trieste*, p. 4). Later Morris draws geographical parallels, suggesting that 'Wales was my Istria' (*Trieste*, p. 143). When she writes that 'a flood of new settlers from southern Italy [...] are changing the character of the city with their noise, bad manners and disorderly conduct', one might notice a palpable connection between those words and Morris's

¹³⁰ Jan Morris, 'With God where the cuckoos sing'.

¹³¹ *Trieste*, p. 34.

description of English incomers into Wales, especially the 'Birmingham immigrants' and the 'heathen' Saxons (*Trieste*, p. 101).

Morris's connections between Trieste and Wales are made with a frequency that suggests wider parallels between the two places. She writes:

At the start of the twenty-first century something remarkable had happened to [Trieste's] spirit [...] Perhaps it was the general feeling that Trieste could prosper best by being entirely itself, a city unique in geography as in history: FUK NATIONS, said that graffito on the refuse bin [...] and perhaps the old place had reached the same conclusion for itself. Or perhaps, like a sheep farmer facing ruin in Wales, it simply realized in its civic heart that the only sensible alternative was diversification.¹³²

There is a shift in tone toward Triestine diversity that isn't necessarily apparent in Morris's visions of a Welsh utopia, the irony being that the Welsh farmer (a symbol of Morris's Abercuawgian Wales) is not immune from the forces of modernisation. Arguably, the fervour with which Morris's explores closed borders and linguistic homogeneity in Wales ventriloquises the nationalists to which she has long been attracted in Wales. After all, while R.S. Thomas 'says things we are ashamed of thinking', Morris has written of incomers with an increasing lack of ambiguity (albeit obscured behind fictions that vary in their aspiration to realism).¹³³

¹³² *Trieste*, p. 169.

¹³³ Morris, 'With God where the cuckoos sing'.

However, there has been one fundamental difference between the Triestine and the Welsh circumstances. The native Welsh have resented the intrusion of the English not just on historical, linguistic or political grounds, but as a matter of instinct: they have disliked them as people – the bloody *Saeson*, the Saxons.¹³⁴

In contrast to Morris's novel *Hav*, whose fictional setting presents Morris with fewer restrictions and an opportunity to create an imaginative geography, *Trieste* provides an opportunity to overlay a personal geography onto physical, 'real' terrain. Foreshadowing the later reference to Borges, the Wallace Stevens epilogue to the book states: 'I was the world in which I walked, and what I saw/ Or heard or felt came not but from myself'.¹³⁵ Morris, channelling Stevens, foregrounds the fact that *Trieste* is not a travel book in the traditional sense. Morris's reflections on Wales while wandering the streets of Trieste are vividly romanticised, and when she feels homesick, it is described in the terms of its partially synonymous Welsh equivalent – *hiraeth*. As Morris writes:

I feel there are good people around, and an unspecified feeling steals narcotically over me – what the Welsh call *hiraeth*. Pathos is part of it, but in a lyrical form to which I am sentimentally susceptible, and at the same time I am excited by a suggestion of sensual desire. The allure of lost consequence and faded power is seducing me, the passing of time, the passing of friends, the scrapping of great ships! In sum, I feel that this opaque seaport of my vision, so full of sweet melancholy,

¹³⁴ *Trieste*, p. 99.

¹³⁵ Wallace Stevens, epilogue to Jan Morris, *Trieste and the Meaning of Nowhere*, unpaginated. Excerpt from Wallace Stevens, 'Tea at the Palaz of Hoon', *Harmonium* (London: Faber and Faber, 2001)

illustrates not just my adolescent emotions of the past, but my life-long preoccupations too. The Trieste effect, I call it.¹³⁶

The 'allure' of 'faded power' and its empirical connotations is undoubtedly problematic for Morris's romanticised notion of an independent Wales. In connecting this longing, *hiraeth*, with 'lyrical form', Morris's vision of Wales is romanticised. There are echoes of imperialism and its inevitable decline in the interplay between the images of scrapped ships and faded power. There is also a reminder of Morris's previous endorsements of imperialism, and such feelings are at once relegated to the status of adolescent emotions as well as being regarded as currently held beliefs. Phillips notes that Morris's ambivalence to colonialism can be problematic:

Morris's Wales is a country colonized by outsiders, and a country capable of returning to something like its former state through decolonization. Decolonized Wales, in Morris's view, would be a country of Welsh speakers, dispersed in relatively small settlements, and cleansed of English influence. Even as a utopian daydream this is profoundly intolerant and regressive. For decolonization is not necessarily about recovering precolonial people and places, but creating new social and political orders in the wake of colonialism.¹³⁷

Compared to Ffowc Elis's utopian vision, in which Wales's citizens are not monolingual but fully bilingual (they are all fully conversant in both Welsh and English), Morris's 'country of

¹³⁶ *Trieste*, p. 4.

¹³⁷ Phillips, p. 18.

Welsh speakers' does appear to be a more extreme utopia, and one could infer from Phillips's language that such a vision is almost dystopian. However, while Morris's vision of a future Wales in *A Machynlleth Triad* advocates a bilingual Wales more akin to that of Ffowc Elis's *Wythnos* (and thus contradicting Phillips' assertion that Morris is singularly focused on creating a monolingual Wales), *Our First Leader* clearly aspires to create a Welsh-speaking Wales.

Hav and Ethnicity

Morris's first book exploring the fictional peninsula of *Hav* was published in 1985, and the second edition – with a new section exploring the aftermath of a revolution referred to as the 'Intervention' – appeared in 2006.¹³⁸ The novel explores Western and non-Western models of nationalism. Hav is multicultural, but the Kretev people in the north of the country are marginalised by the institutions and political power in the south. In *Hav*, the process of decolonization is very specifically about the 'recovery of a precolonial people'. In effect, Morris creates an analogy for what Etienne Balibar refers to as 'Fictive Ethnicity'.¹³⁹ Balibar writes:

Fictive ethnicity is not purely and simply identical with the *ideal nation* which is the object of patriotism, but it is indispensable to it, for, without it, the nation would appear only as an idea or an arbitrary abstraction; patriotism's appeal would be

¹³⁸ Jan Morris, *Last Letters from Hav* (London: Viking Press, 1985).

¹³⁹ Etienne Balibar, 'The Nation Form: History and Ideology', in Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, trans. Chris Turner (London: Verso, 1991), 86-106, p. 96.

addressed to no one. It is fictive ethnicity which makes it possible for the expression of a pre-existing unity to be seen in the state.¹⁴⁰

In creating a fictional space (and a fictive ethnicity to inhabit that space), Morris attempts to dissociate her text from both real space and real political situations. In doing so, the *literally* fictive ethnicity of the Kretevs become analogous to Morris's writing about (north-west) Wales. Morris's writing about Wales (and for that matter, Venice, Trieste, and Casablanca) does not attempt to divest itself from engagement with the political and historical significance of those places, and it embraces the previous attempts by writers to write about those places. Using Calvino's discussion of the city of Paris as an imaginary and real space, Tally suggests that

just as literature may be a means of mapping the places represented in a given literary work, the places themselves are deeply imbued with a literary history that has transformed and determined how those places will be 'read' or mapped.¹⁴¹

The real and imagined spaces with which Morris has become synonymous are literary constructions as well as real geographies. So, where Morris's uses Trieste to explore themes of colonialism and sovereignty, *Hav* is used to explore ethnicity and nationalism (and say the unsayable, like R.S. Thomas). In creating the fictional location of *Hav*, Morris's text does not

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 96.

¹⁴¹ Tally, *Spatiality*, p. 80. The Calvino quotation, also cited in Westphal's *Geocriticism*, p. 150 is: 'B]efore being a city of the real world [...] has been a city that I have imagined through books, a city that you appropriate when you read'. Originally quoted from Italo Calvino, *Hermit in Paris: Autobiographical Writings*, trans. Martin McLaughlin (New York: Vintage, 2003), p. 167.

contend with the weight of a real literary or political history, but that is not to say that she doesn't create one herself. As Morris writes in *Hav*'s epilogue, '[h]aving failed to master so many real places, I invented one' (*Hav*, p. 299). The ambiguity of Morris's phrasing here is revealing. First, the mastery of a place (itself a distinctly gendered concept) suggests that a writer might physically dominate a city, as in 'overcome or defeat', 'reduce to subjection, compel to obey', '[t]o have at one's disposal', but also the more metaphysical 'to acquire complete knowledge or understanding of'.¹⁴² The imagined space of *Hav* also allows Morris to invoke certain aspects of Welshness without others. In creating an imaginary utopia, Morris explores the way in which nations are created, and the way in which varieties of cultural and ethnic nationalisms develop. Even an imaginary geography such as *Hav* is still a distinctly European utopia, with cultural components comparable to both Wales and Trieste, and a history of occupation that would be familiar to several European nations. Morris is suggesting that she has created a *real* place, and echoes this blurring of the real and imaginary in *A Writer's House in Wales*, in which she writes: 'I have sufficient Celt in me too, only another way of saying that imagination is as real as reality'.¹⁴³

Racial purity underpins the formation of the post-Intervention Havian Republic in *Hav of the Myrmidons* (the second book, published in 2005). The narrator reflects on her uncertainty regarding the Caliph (the ruler of Hav during the second section), and his peculiar expressions: 'I was not at all sure I could read him between the lines'.¹⁴⁴ Cultural and ethnic differences between Havians are recognised, but *Hav*'s utopian vision of a nation-state – it is

¹⁴² 'master', v. *OED*

<<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/114753?rskey=b4CB65&result=3#eid>>

¹⁴³ *A Writer's House in Wales*, p. 57.

¹⁴⁴ *Hav*, p. 294

actually a peninsula not unlike Wales in its physical geography – is dependent upon its connection to a preserved ancestral lineage. While the peninsula of Hav has its land border to the north, many of Wales’ geographical features are presented in the same order. A mountainous north, a capital city in the south (containing both political and capital power, as well as its major ports and trading docks), and a relatively unpopulated, agricultural centre. Hav’s Intervention (its revolution and change in government) is predicated upon a newly discovered connection to the ancient Myrmidon civilisation of Achilles. This theory is founded upon a recently-discovered genetic anomaly in the previously disregarded cave-dwelling Kretevs in the mountainous north of Hav. The discovery of the genetic legitimacy of the troglodyte Kretevs – whose name ‘is thought to be etymologically related to the Welsh *crwydwyr*, wanderers’ – in the mountainous north of Hav provides a platform for regime change:¹⁴⁵

[I]n the past it has sometimes been proposed that the Kretevs, the cave-dwellers of the Escarpment, were not as had previously been thought Celts from central Europe, but descendants of that lost Myrmidonic host [...] Now DNA tests carried out by our Office ethnic scientists have indeed established that the Kretev blood-stream [...] had no known Celtic affinities. [...] During the Intervention, evidence was clandestinely discovered which proved without doubt that the ancient Cathar families of Hav, the Perfects of the ancient cult, *shared the same ethnicity*. In short [...] our Cathar theocracy could claim unquestioned and legitimate descent from the Myrmidon

¹⁴⁵ Hav, p. 49.

warrior people who first came to Hav with the hero Achilles – possibly, unlikely though it sounds, through the medium of troglodytes!¹⁴⁶

Where Morris explores cultural nationalism in Wales and Trieste, in *Hav*, perhaps freed by its fictional setting, Morris explores the effects of a more ethnically charged nationalism. Paul Theroux, who includes a section from *Hav* in his *Tao of Travel*, remarks: ‘It is, incidentally, also a way of showing how the somewhat despised Kretevs – those ancestors of the Welsh, of whose nation Jan is a proud member – have been overwhelmed.’¹⁴⁷ Theroux is one of the few readers to explicitly acknowledge the connection between the Kretevs and Wales (even if this connection is proved to be cultural rather than shared Celtic genetics), but I would suggest that this does not go far enough. The Kretevs are not simply representative of Welsh people, but the people of north Wales. They are representative of a kind of Welshness that continues to resist assimilation into an Anglicised/Americanised culture encroaching on their borders (the areas of Wales that form Cymru Newydd in *Our First Leader*). The novel creates clear and unambiguous connections between the respective literatures and geographies of Wales and *Hav*. Visiting the ‘troglodyte’ Kretevs, Morris’s narrator remarks that ‘[e]verything was brilliantly clean: it all reminded me of a Welsh

¹⁴⁶ *Hav*, p. 216.

¹⁴⁷ Paul Theroux, *The Tao of Travel: Enlightenments from Lives on the Road* (London: Penguin, 2012), p. 180. The hinterland of the Escarpment in which the Kretevs live in *Hav* is, cartographically, marginalised in the frontispiece maps that begin each part of the novel. The ideology of a new Myrmidon Republic of Hav has been literally preserved underground in the cave and tunnels of the Escarpment, beneath one of the great megalithic structures (visible on the map) that alludes to Morris’s own fascination with Welsh megaliths. It is worth noting that in the same year that *Hav* was published Morris wrote the foreword for a collection of essays entitled: *Megalith: Eleven Journeys in Search of Stones*, Damian Walford Davies, ed. (Llandysul: Gomer, 2006)

farmhouse.’¹⁴⁸ Elsewhere she writes of ‘hoping to recognize some Celtic affinities’ between Welsh and the Kretev languages (*Hav*, p. 174.) In Morris’s first visit to Hav, she describes a séance that ‘reminded me more of a Welsh eisteddfod than a spiritualist meeting’.¹⁴⁹ This resonates with Morris’s utopian vision for Wales in *A Machynlleth Triad*, which describes the political significance of the eisteddfod and the utopian Machynlleth Welsh Assembly: ‘It [the opening of the new Welsh Assembly in Machynlleth] is a moment full of allusion. For older Welsh people it stands, above all, recognizably in the grand old tradition of the National Eisteddfod – its rituals are much the same, and much of the Eisteddfod spirit has been subsumed into that of the Assembly.’¹⁵⁰ In *The Princeship of Wales* Morris writes of the political importance of such cultural events: ‘The peripatetic *Eisteddfod Genedlaethol*, the National Eisteddfod, founded by eccentric litterateurs at the start of the century, became a grand national occasion, with pageantries that were almost State symbolisms. Nationalism in a political sense became a serious issue, as it never had been since the rebellion of Owain Glyndwr in 1404.’¹⁵¹

As one Cathar character remarks to Morris’s narrator: ‘you yourself come from Wales – Cymru, is it? He says it is itself an often forgotten province of heroic origins, and suggests that this predisposes you, as it were, to absorb the Hav epic and its aesthetic.’¹⁵² This mythological connection to Wales is reinforced initially by the shared Celtic cultural experience of the inhabitants of Hav and Wales. *Hav* presents an alternate reality, a Mediterranean peninsula that exhibits some similarities to Wales, not least in its poetry:

¹⁴⁸ *Hav*, p. 173.

¹⁴⁹ *Hav*, p. 167

¹⁵⁰ *A Machynlleth Triad*, p. 84.

¹⁵¹ Jan Morris, *The Princeship of Wales* (Llandysul: Gomer, 1995) p. 10.

¹⁵² *Hav*, p. 215.

The earliest known poet of Hav was the Arab Rahman ibn Muhammed, 'The Song-Bird', who lived in the thirteenth century: in his work occur words, inflexions, ideas and even techniques (including the alliterative device called *cynghanedd*) which seem to show that in those days a Celtic poetic tradition was still very much alive in this peninsula. It has even been lately suggested that Rahman may have been in touch with his contemporary on the far side of Europe, the Welsh lyric bard Dafydd ap Gwilym [...] Coincidence? Or perhaps, more probably than actual communication between the two poets, some empathy of temperament and tradition.¹⁵³

This passage, from Morris's first volume, *Last Letters from Hav*, reflects the Havian citizens' pre-Intervention attitude to cultural heritage, in which hybridity is foregrounded over homogeneity, and cultures are shared without becoming appropriated. Morris attempts to articulate the importance of cultural heritage to Havian identity (and how Havian writers began to question the co-opting of their culture by politicians), while also ascribing a certain importance to a natural (*ethnic*) temperament. The shared cultural heritage between Wales and Hav is disrupted after the ethnically charged Intervention, in which the shared Celtic lineage between contemporary Wales and Hav is proven to be false, enabling the new ruling class of Hav to extricate themselves from more complex contemporary European politics and return to the ancient civilising force of Greece.¹⁵⁴ This return is predicated upon creating a narrative in which the Kretev people provide a genetic key to ethnic purity,

¹⁵³ *Hav*, pp. 128-9

¹⁵⁴ A process that has clear parallels with the Romans in *A Machynlleth Triad*.

making it possible, as Balibar states, ‘for the expression of a pre-existing unity to be seen in the state’.

Jan Morris: Conclusion

Morris’s work has clearly made a significant contribution to nationalist discourse in Wales. Prescient in its discussion of the impact of devolution (in the case of *Machynlleth* several years before the 1997 referendum had even been announced), it remains to be seen whether she is also prescient in her prediction of a Welsh republic. Morris’s writing about non-Welsh spaces, unencumbered directly by discussions of Welsh nationalism, are far more instructive indicators of Morris’s attitude toward political ideology. As a Welsh romantic and utopian thinker, her writing provides a distinctive insight into a relatively unexplored aspect of Welsh writing and devolution. Rather than becoming encumbered by the specifics, and without resorting to the expected science fiction tropes of utopian writing, Morris explores the consequences of both cultural and ethnic nationalism. If initially reticent about saying what Welsh nationalists ‘are ashamed of thinking’ (while continuing to say things that are by no means palatable to many modern Welsh nationalists), Morris’s post-devolution fiction is often a cathartic mix of nationalist rhetoric and sensitivity to several resonant contemporary Welsh events. As with Sinclair, Morris’s treatment of non-Welsh spaces is not only influenced by her home territory, but can even be seen to be a way in which to negotiate those most complex aspects of national identity and Welshness/*Cymreictod*.

The geographical and imaginative distance that both Trieste and Hav allow grants Morris an opportunity to comment indirectly on contemporary Wales, and since the publication of *The Matter of Wales*, the places Morris has visited for her non-fiction work have been used, to varying extents, as points of comparison for Wales.¹⁵⁵ Morris reflects on the omission of writing about Wales in her travel writing collection, *A Writer's World* as follows:

I have included very little about my own country, Wales, but believe me, between the lines of almost every piece in the book something of Cymru lurks and smiles, like a Green Man on a misericord.¹⁵⁶

Morris's misericord metaphor echoes Raymond Williams's reflection on writing *Culture and Society*, that 'unconsciously my Welsh experience was nevertheless operating on the strategy of the book'.¹⁵⁷ While much of Morris's late twentieth-century travel writing of non-Welsh spaces contains references to Wales to varying degrees, this statement hints at an occluded Welshness in her non-fiction (as can be seen in the discussion of *Trieste* above). Morris urges readers to look in between the lines of her fiction. Writing about the composition of *Last Letters from Hav* (1985) in her account of Trieste she writes: 'I wrote a novel about an entirely imaginary Levantine city, and found when I finished it that between every line was Trieste lurking'.¹⁵⁸ Trieste and the 'Green Man' both lurking in her work are facets of Morris's 'covert' expressions of Welshness. Thus in *Hav*, Morris discusses ethnic

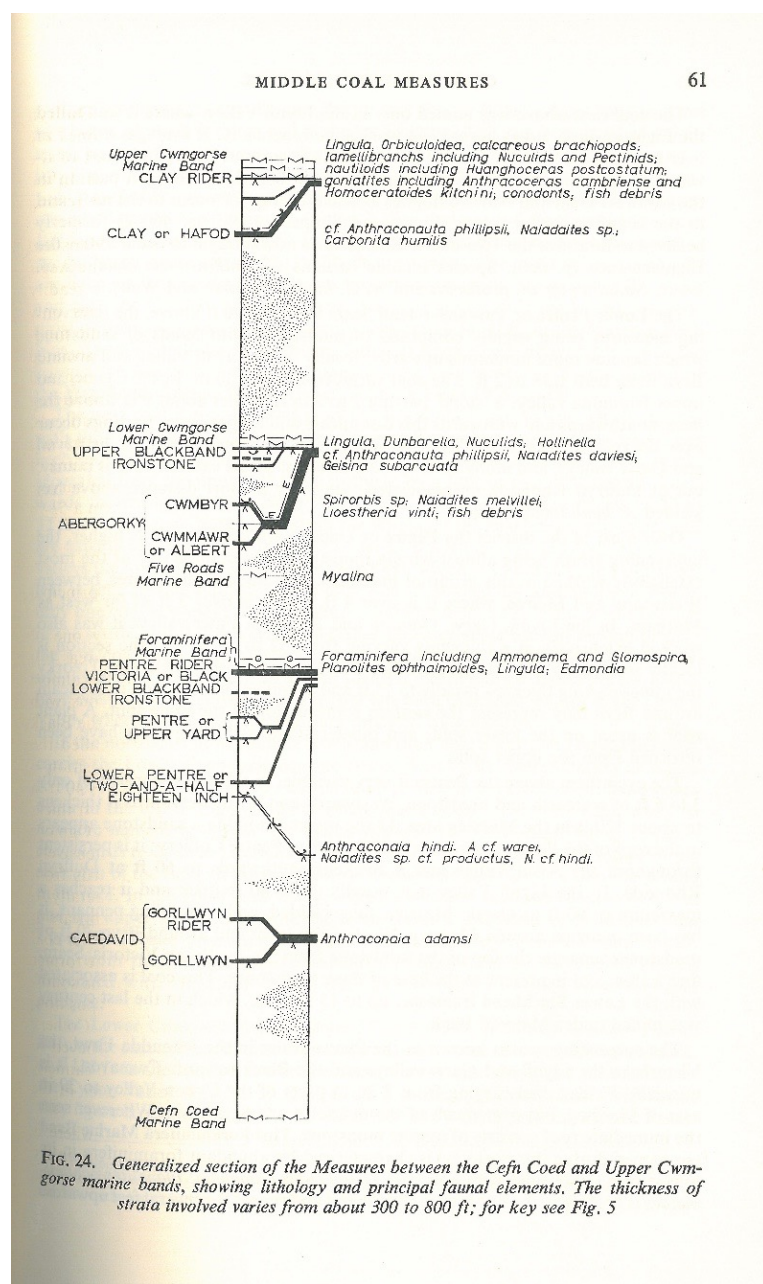
¹⁵⁵ Jan Morris, *The Matter of Wales: Epic Views of a Small Country* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), later re-published as *Wales: Epic Views of a Small Country* (London: Penguin, 2000). The Penguin re-issue is the edition used in this chapter.

¹⁵⁶ Jan Morris, *A Writer's World: Travels 1950-2000*, p. xiv.

¹⁵⁷ Raymond Williams, *Politics and Letters: Interviews with New Left Review* (London: Verso, 1979), p. 113. Quoted in Daniel Williams ed., *Who Speaks for Wales*, p. xxii.

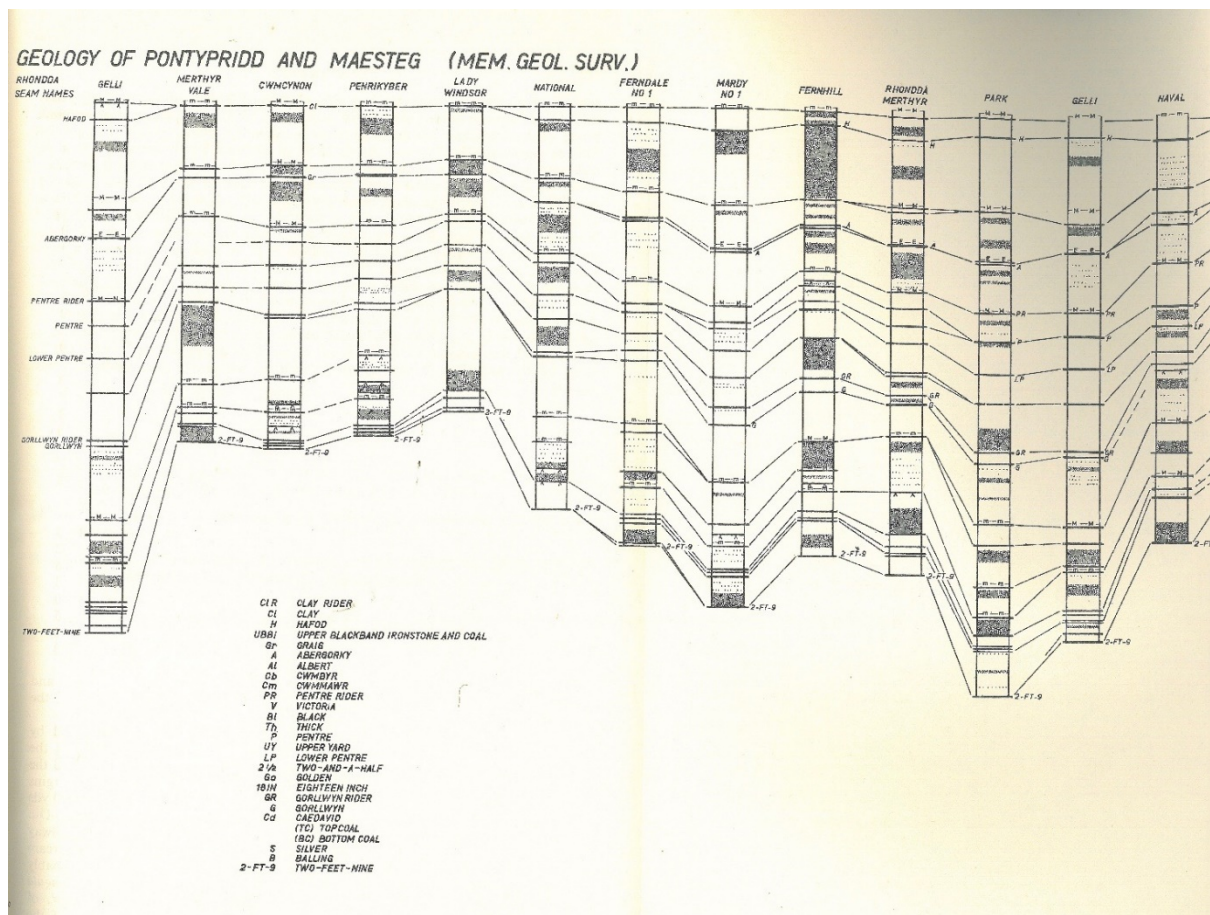
¹⁵⁸ *Trieste*, p. 187.

cohesion (a theme also explored in 'Y Wladfa'), but ultimately the imaginary city continues with a more utopian combination of civic and ethnic nationalism (which is nonetheless deeply problematic). While the Kretev/Celtic links are not substantiated, the 'clandestine' methods used to establish genetic links ultimately serve a higher purpose of integration, producing a cultural cohesion, rather than through racial cleansing, as in *Our First Leader*. Morris's non-Welsh texts are clearly indebted to her own experience and understanding of Welsh nationalism, and her visions of independence, whether in Machynlleth, Y Wladfa, or *Hav*, suggest a utopianist vision of a nation-state built upon an essentialist interpretation of Welshness (or nationhood) that would be considered anathema to the nationalist politics of contemporary Wales.



'Middle Coal Measures'¹

¹ Aubrey Strahan, R.H. Tiddeman and Walcot Gibson, *The geology of the South Wales coal-field. Part IV, the country around Pontypridd and Maes-Têg : being an account of the region comprised in sheet 248 of the map* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1964), p. 61.



‘Details of Correlation of Measure from Two-Foot-Nine to Upper Cwmgorse Marine Band’²

² From *The geology of the South Wales coal-field*, Plate VI (unpaginated).

In contrast to Morris, Iain Sinclair is a writer who is not especially concerned with Welsh independence or devolution, and does not stray into the kind of overt ethnic nationalism exemplified by Morris's Welsh texts. Indeed, it is on Sinclair's ambivalence about Wales, and its various political (and bureaucratic) processes, that this chapter will focus. This chapter will also explore Sinclair's lasting impact on the field of an especially Welsh kind of psychogeography, and the looming presence of psychogeography as a narrative of cultural resistance in Wales since devolution. Morris's conservative, ethnically Welsh (Abercuawgian) utopias point toward a vision of Wales that is difficult to reconcile with more openly multicultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-lingual narratives of Welshness since devolution. Sinclair's psychogeographical resistance the dominant narratives of space, in London and Wales, provides a lens through which contemporary Welsh writing might be viewed.

Both Jan Morris and Iain Sinclair had firmly established their writing careers prior to the devolution referendum. They had also, crucially, become established in their respective literary niches: Morris as historian and travel writer, and Sinclair as avant garde poet and London-writer. However, while Sinclair's Welsh writing was largely restricted to coded references prior to his post-devolution publications, Morris had begun a transition into the discourse of Wales – whether from a historical perspective (as in *The Matter of Wales* in 1984), or a contemporary one (in *The Princeship of Wales* in 1995) – significantly prior to the 1997 devolution referendum.³ Given that the two writers began writing directly about

³ Jan Morris, *The Matter of Wales: Epic Views of a Small Country* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), later re-published as *Wales: Epic Views of a Small Country* (London: Penguin,

Wales at distinctly different periods in their careers (and at different junctures in late-twentieth-century Welsh political history), a different approach is required for each. A reading of Morris as a devolutionary writer necessitated an understanding of some of her key pre-devolution Welsh texts, in order to ascertain what kind of an effect, if any, devolution had on her writing and the ensuing critical discussion of Morris as a Welsh writer.⁴ With Sinclair the objective, at least initially, will be to draw out a kind of latent (or subtextual) Welshness in his pre-devolution work. A reading of Morris and Sinclair can hopefully more clearly delineate their own shifting political and nationalist (or patriotic, a term that Morris would prefer) allegiances. In tandem with her engagement with the discourse of Welsh nationalism, Morris continued to publish travel writing on non-Welsh places, and her Welsh projects were infrequent at first. However, this is not to say that there isn't, as with Morris, a similar level of Welsh subtext in Sinclair's non-Welsh writing, in much of which 'something of Cymru lurks and smiles'.⁵ Sinclair, a writer who has written comparatively little about Wales, has begun to return to Welsh themes and settings in his post-devolution work. In what follows, there will also be, as with Morris, an attention to the critical reception of Sinclair's work. This discussion (and that of the thesis as a whole) of the discourse of devolution and Welsh literature is one of critical reception as much as the role of the writer.

2000). The Penguin re-issue is the edition used in this chapter. *The Princeship of Wales* (Llandysul: Gomer, 1995).

⁴ While I recognise that the term 'Welsh text' is problematic, it is not intended as a homogeneous signifier. It is used to refer to texts by both Sinclair and Morris that are outwardly *about* Wales, rather than texts that make little to no mention of Wales. So, *Llandor's Tower* (Sinclair's novel set in Wales), and *The Princeship of Wales* (Morris's essay) both fall into this category, whereas Sinclair's *Downriver*, or Morris's *Venice* do not.

⁵ Jan Morris, *A Writer's World: Travels 1950-2000* (London: Faber and Faber, 2003), p. xiv.

While Sinclair and Morris write in different genres (and operate in different literary circles), there are some notable points of confluence in their careers. Both are predominantly published by London-based presses, but also both publish what might be categorised as ‘second-stream’ specialist texts with independent publishing houses. In 2001, the year in which Sinclair published *Landor’s Tower* – which he later described as a ‘career suicide note’ – Jan Morris released what was purported to be her own final book, *Trieste and the Meaning of Nowhere* (2001), in which she writes: ‘[t]he books I have written are no more than smudged graffiti on a wall, and I shall write no more of them’.⁶ Neither Sinclair’s ‘suicide note’ nor Morris’s proposed retirement have been permanent, and both writers have published several books in the twenty-first century. Both works were written and published in the immediate aftermath of devolution, although neither could be said to be direct response to devolution itself. Of the two texts, it is Sinclair’s novel that comes the closest to engaging with the subject of devolution directly. As such, in these texts there is an apparent role-reversal, one in which Sinclair approaches Wales directly (as he had not done previously), and Morris discusses her own Welsh identity as mediated through the geography of another city (as Sinclair had done in his early London works). In *Trieste*, Morris – a writer who would go on to contribute in a variety of ways to the debate surrounding devolution in the first decade of the twenty-first century – deals with contemporary Wales indirectly. At first glance this may seem to be an unusual comparison, between a confessedly ‘Welsh’ novel (written by a Welsh exile) and the work of a travel writer and

⁶ Sinclair, in a self-composed, unused biography for *Dining on Stones*, in the *Iain Sinclair Papers*, Harry Ransom Center, Dining on Stones folder [awaiting complete approved reference format] 8/5/04. The biography was used to accompany Sinclair’s contribution to the Peter Finch and Grahame Davies edited collection, *The Big Book of Cardiff* (Bridgend: Seren, 2005), p. 248. Jan Morris, *Trieste and the Meaning of Nowhere* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), p. 186.

historian (and English incomer) about a non-Welsh place. However, there is a strong element of symmetry between the two texts: *Landor's Tower*, a novel whose narrator would rather be anywhere *but* Wales, and *Trieste*, a book about a city whose narrative continually, symbolically, returns to and reflects upon Wales. More simply put, *Landor's Tower* is a novel concerned with the narrator's desire to return to London rather than providing any rigorous exploration of contemporary Wales. Morris's *Trieste* is not only a meditation on the geography, history, and culture of that city, but also a deeply personal Welsh memoir, focused on a place that serves as a waypoint in Morris's own life and career.

While Norton, the narrator of *Landor's Tower*, feels a continual pull towards London, and ironically mimics the language of the eponymous poet Walter Savage Landor prior to leaving Wales in semi-disgrace, Morris's writing frequently evinces a desire to return to Wales, as well as emphasising the author's own Welshness.⁷ Both writers display differing levels of attachment to notions of Welsh national identity, providing contrasting narratives of the emigrant in exile versus the newly acquired nationalist politics of the immigrant. Sinclair's own Welsh identity is in many ways constituted by his resistance to being labelled as English, rather than any positive assertion of national Welsh identity.

⁷ Landor once wrote that 'If drunkenness, idleness, mischief, and revenge are the principle characteristics of the savage state, what nation [...] is so singularly tattooed with them as the Welsh.' Quoted in Sidney Colvin, *Landor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1881), p. 73. Norton, amongst other things, describes the locals he encounters as 'forelock tugging, piss-in-your-boots-Welsh, border folk bred into playing one side off against the other', *Landor's Tower*, p. 11.

Sinclair's Critical Reception in Wales

Downriver is a novel about London. The author, Iain Sinclair, is not usually thought of as a Welsh writer.⁸

Steven Hitchins's remark cited above reaffirms a long-established (and prevailing) idea that Iain Sinclair's fiction, in this case *Downriver* (1991), is 'about' London.⁹ It is the opening sentence of an essay nominating Sinclair's novel *Downriver* for *Wales Arts Review's* 'Greatest Welsh Novel' competition, in which Hitchins acknowledges Sinclair's apparent absence from any contemporary Welsh (or Wales-based) writing scene. He suggests that Sinclair's work is emblematic of 'Welsh literature by a nomadic route: tapping into Dylan Thomas via Allen Ginsberg and the Beats, Welsh writing filtered back through America', a 'nomadic Welsh lineage [that] offers an alternative to the usual static nation-based notions of literary heritage'.¹⁰ While Sinclair's interest in the Beats provided the material for his first major project, the film *Ah, Sunflower!* (1967), as well as one of his more recent books, *American Smoke* (2013), Hitchins's statement only partially reflects his complex literary

⁸ Steven Hitchins, 'The Greatest Welsh Novel #10: *Downriver* by Iain Sinclair', *Wales Arts Review*, 3 September 2014, <<http://www.walesartsreview.org/greatest-welsh-novel-10-downriver-by-iain-sinclair/>>

⁹ Iain Sinclair, *Downriver* (1991) (London: Vintage, 1995).

¹⁰ Hitchins, 'The Greatest Welsh Novel', un-paginated.

geography.¹¹ Sinclair has rarely been published by Wales-based publishers (this chapter will highlight some of the more significant exceptions), and as a result writing on Sinclair in Wales remains scarce.¹² While an early career move to London may account for his relative absence from literary discourse in Wales, in interviews as well as his published works Sinclair has been keen to state the importance of Wales – its history, literature (in both English and Welsh), and geography – to his London project. Although Sinclair has undoubtedly developed a reputation as a London writer, this categorisation should signify the heterogeneity and plurality of the urban landscape that has been his domain for the last forty years, but is often used to homogenise Sinclair's work in a way that is both reductive and disingenuous. As Sinclair himself states:

There's this frightening sense that I must have some weird brand image as the London psychogeographer. [...] In a way I've allowed myself to become this London brand. I've become a hack on my own mythology, which fascinates me. From there on in you can either go with it or subvert it.¹³

The subversion of his public persona (and his Welsh *mythos*, which will be returned to later), has been a key strategy for Sinclair throughout a career that has spanned more than forty prolific years. Although all of these years have been spent outside of Wales, I would argue

¹¹ Iain Sinclair and Robert Klinkert, *Ah, Sunflower! (Allen Ginsberg in London)* (Cologne: WDR, 1967); Iain Sinclair, *American Smoke: Journeys to the End of the Light, A Fiction of Memory* (London: Penguin, 2013).

¹² Although elements of this work have been published as 'Iain Sinclair: Born in (South) Wales, 2001', in *The International Journal of Welsh Writing in English*, vol. 3 (2015), pp. 1-20.

¹³ Iain Sinclair cited in Stuart Jeffries, 'On the road,' *The Guardian*, 24 April, 2004, <<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2004/apr/24/featuresreviews.guardianreview14>>

that *Downriver's* sustained references to and adaptations of the *Mabinogion* signify a clear, unambiguous Welshness and serve as a rejoinder to any lingering perception of Sinclair as a writer who had neglected his Welsh literary heritage (beyond Dylan Thomas) until the publication of his only identifiably Welsh novel, *Landor's Tower*. Its publication in 2001, two years after the establishment of the Welsh Assembly, highlights a significant change in the direction of the discussion of Welsh writing in English since devolution.¹⁴

When *Landor's Tower* was published, it was noted that it was the first time a Sinclair text had publicly identified its author as 'born in Wales', as it was the first appearance of his place of birth in an authorial blurb for a novel. This assertion – originally made in *Planet* magazine (and repeated in a subsequent essay by M. Wynn Thomas and Jane Aaron) – implies that Sinclair's Welshness was co-opted by his London-based publisher (Granta) in an effort to capitalise on a post-devolutionary surge of interest in works either based in Wales or written by Welsh authors.¹⁵ Niall Griffiths and Malcolm Pryce, published in the early part of the twenty-first century by Jonathan Cape and Bloomsbury respectively, are also cited as examples of this trend.¹⁶ That Sinclair, who for the thirty years prior to the publication of *Landor's Tower* had not published either in or about Wales, had published a book set almost entirely in Wales, as well as for the first time referring to himself as 'born in Wales', further enhanced the impression of him as an exile. However, as I will argue, this categorisation over-simplifies Sinclair's literary heritage.

¹⁴ Iain Sinclair, *Landor's Tower* (London: Granta, 2001).

¹⁵ Richard Jones, 'A Welshman disguised as a Londoner: a Profile of Iain Sinclair by Richard Jones', *Planet*, 148 (2001), pp. 55–60. M. Wynn Thomas and Jane Aaron, "'Pulling you through changes": Welsh Writing in English before, between and after two Referenda', in *Welsh Writing in English* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), pp. 278–309, p. 300.

¹⁶ Thomas and Aaron, 'Pulling you through changes', p. 300.

One significant consequence of attending to this apparent post-devolutionary surge of interest by London-based publishers is that it presents an opportunity to discuss the cultural impact of devolution beyond the Welsh border, and outside of any Wales-based literary establishment or funding body. This is in contrast to the *New Stories* (as well as, to a lesser extent, Canongate's *Myth* series, both of which will be discussed in Part Two of this thesis) and its wider post-devolutionary interest in national mythology, which was nonetheless one that was fostered within the borders of Wales, and made possible by a funding body that had received a greater degree of autonomy since devolution (and a publisher, Seren, that didn't exist prior to the referendum). One danger implicit in such a discussion is that it might subjugate the emergence of particular literatures to the political realisation of devolution. Furthermore, Sinclair was already an established London-writer prior to devolution, so his 'return' signifies something different to the emergence of both Pryce and Griffiths, who came to prominence following the referendum. Where Sinclair's work prior to *Landor's Tower* differs from that of Pryce and Griffiths is that a discussion of it as *Welsh* literature was seemingly predicated on establishing the significance of Sinclair's nationality (rather than any identifiable Welsh themes in his work).¹⁷

A discussion of Sinclair and devolution does not need to attempt to identify explicit references to devolution in order to discuss the relationship between his work and contemporary Welsh politics, and nor is it solely contingent on those few texts that Sinclair has published in Wales (or whose publication is predicated on Welsh Assembly funding). The

¹⁷ Pryce was both born in and writing about Aberystwyth, and Griffiths was born in Liverpool but was writing fiction set (predominantly) in West Wales.

suggestion above – that Sinclair’s writing in London was nonetheless affected by devolution in a way that is more reflective of the practice of the attitudinal change in publishers rather than writers – provides an intriguing, if problematic framework for this discussion of Sinclair and Wales. Intriguing, because it places a focus not on writers but on publishers (as well as wider literary trends), which will provide a useful precursor to the discussion of the post-devolution output of Seren in Part Two. Problematic, because it assumes that Sinclair’s contribution to Welsh literature since devolution is contingent only on his place of birth, rather than the significance of his writing to a discussion of contemporary Welsh literature or Welsh spaces, and how Welsh writing functions both inside and outside the devolved funding paradigm.

While sustained discussion or criticism of devolution is largely absent in Sinclair’s work (his post-devolutionary output is still predominantly London-based), there are ample reminders of the effects of devolution that have occurred in his absence from Wales. Fundamentally, we might first think of Sinclair as a writer *in whose absence* the process of devolution as both a realisable aim and fundamentally paradigmatic shift in late-twentieth-century Welsh politics was begun in earnest. The maps at the beginning of this chapter illustrate an issue of fundamental importance to Sinclair’s Welsh and London projects: the effect of the decline of industry and the change of those places that were originally vested with meaning (in that they produced something tangible) into the anonymous ‘non-places’ identified by Marc Augé.¹⁸ For Sinclair the decline of the coal mines in South Wales was perhaps his earliest, most resonant political touchstone. It is also one that would arguably contribute to Sinclair’s

¹⁸ Marc Augé, *Non-places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans. John Howe (London: Verso, 1995).

literary evisceration of Margaret Thatcher, Prime Minister during the Miners' Strike (1984-5), in *Downriver* (she appeared in the novel as a character called 'The Widow').¹⁹ The mines in South Wales, and their closure, had a lasting impact on Sinclair's hometown Maesteg. The decline of the surrounding industry, and specifically the Miners' Strike, is also vital to an understanding of the shift in the Welsh electorate between the referendums in 1979 and 1997 (as will be discussed in chapter four). An early outline for a documentary film (which was never made) called 'Doctor' provides illuminating insight into Sinclair's interest on the effects of continuing industrial decline in the valley that ultimately resulted in strike action. Centred on his father's GP practice, the outline of the documentary provides a resonant premonition of the notorious Sinclair biography that first accompanied *Lights Out for the Territory*, 'Iain Sinclair, son of a doctor').²⁰ The brief outline is as follows:

A documentary to deal with the life of a general practitioner in a Welsh mining valley [...] Into this framework will be injected the history of the doctor from the time of the General Strike when he first started to practice. This will be a personal history (marriage, death of father, birth of son) and a history of the Valley (the Strike, the years of economic depression, 2nd World War, defeat of Churchill, Coronation, Beatle years).

¹⁹ At its core *Downriver* contains an extended critique of a Thatcher-like character ('The Widow' is a sinister purveyor of neoliberal economics), and by extension Thatcherism itself. See *Downriver* (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 4.

²⁰ Iain Sinclair, *Lights Out for the Territory: 9 Excursions in the Secret History of London* (London: Granta, 1997).

The theme will be close to that of Dr William Carlos Williams in Paterson where he states 'that a man in himself is a city, beginning, seeking, achieving and concluding his life in ways which the various aspects of the city might embody.'²¹

For Sinclair, his father's experience resonates not just on a personal level, but as a visible embodiment of a town which had undergone decline through not only loss of industry in the twentieth century but also war and the rise of the post-war Labour Party (which assumed power from Winston Churchill in 1945 under the leadership of Clement Attlee). Evidence of the decline of the mines in the South Wales valleys occurs in Sinclair's most recent book *Black Apples of Gower* (which will be discussed in more detail in the final section of this chapter). Sinclair writes: 'We forgot that every valley was an abandoned coalmine, a fouled river, an impenetrable thatch of lightless conifers with dead undergrowth.'²² While there are clearly many contributing factors resulting in the decline of the coal-mining industry in South Wales (and Maesteg), there seems to be a plausible connection between Sinclair's distrust of the neo-liberal economics of Margaret Thatcher in *Downriver* and his own clear experience as articulated in the outline for 'Doctor'.

Devolution and Funding in *Landor's Tower*

A significant (and almost immediately apparent) effect of a change in political system such as devolution is the allocation of public money. The writers most affected by Welsh devolution are those writing in or about Wales itself, especially those who established their

²¹ Document: 'Doctor (outline)', Folder: 'Doctor', Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin.

²² *Black Apples of Gower: Stone Footing in Memory Fields* (Dorset: Little Toller, 2015), p. 113.

reputation after devolution. However, one might consider the economics of Sinclair's writing (and its production outside Wales), his reputation as a London writer, and his lack of access to the funding bodies who supported the work of his early contemporaries, such as Peter Finch (discussed in Part Two). Sinclair's career as a writer is itself entwined with both successes and failures in obtaining funding, both for his own writing and that published by his own Albion Village Press.

The devolution referendum of 1997 and its impact of the literary community is acknowledged in *Landor's Tower* explicitly, in a conversation between Norton (the novel's protagonist) and a minor character, Mac:

'We're political in Wales now', Mac told me. 'Realigned. You're a writer. You should move back, do your bit. I can fix you up with a nice place to live [...] I know all the boyos from Yr Academi Cymreig [sic]. Grants from here to Christmas' [...]

I didn't like the sound of this, but I smiled and accepted another drink.²³

In his absence from Wales, Norton (who is a thinly disguised avatar for Sinclair himself), the nation has become political, and this change is implicitly connected to the administration of grants. The emergent 'political' Wales of *Landor's Tower* is one in which 'the old Labour alliances were finished [...] gone with the mines', and Yr Academi Gymreig (the typo in the above extract is perhaps as much an indication of the novel's copy-editor as Sinclair's own capacity for Welsh), is described as a cartel-like organisation; one that has evidently become

²³ *Landor's Tower*, p. 273.

more powerful in Sinclair's absence.²⁴ The realignment of Welsh politics might simply refer to a change, and be synonymous with 'reorganised' or 'reformulated'.²⁵ However, there is also the sense of a return to a previous system (or as the OED defines it, 'to return to previously aligned positions'), thus devolved Wales is posited as a newly formed coalition of sorts, one built upon historical alliances that extend to an era prior to the emergence of the Labour strongholds of the industrial South Wales valleys. The old Wales is threatened by the new, uncertain political paradigm of devolution, one that Norton '[doesn't] like the sound of'. Perhaps the most revealing part of this (fictionalised) exchange is the offer for Sinclair to return and 'do' his 'bit', presumably in exchange for a grant. 'Do your bit' euphemistically implies a request for Sinclair to contribute to Welsh literary culture – a request that, given Sinclair's disposition to fictionalising 'real' encounters, may or may not be embellished – and suggests that his work up to this point had not done so. In fact, Sinclair's attempt to 'do his bit' (to write a Welsh book) resulted in *Landor's Tower* – the publication of which resulted in Sinclair being briefly banned from Hay Festival – rendering his transition across the border into Wales (relatively) unsuccessful (and unwelcome), and *Landor's Tower* ostensibly a failed project.²⁶ While Sinclair's neo-modernist poetry might not be conducive to a direct discussion of politics, his prose is more politically engaged. His ban from the Hay Festival

²⁴ *Landor's Tower*, p. 273.

²⁵ Two synonyms provided in the *Oxford English Dictionary* entry for 'realign', <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/158929>>

²⁶ Jon Gower's review of *The Black Apples of Gower* mentions that *Landor's Tower* 'got him [Sinclair] banned from the Hay Festival because of his depiction of the border town's booksellers', <<http://www.caughtbytheriver.net/2015/07/14/black-apples-of-gower-iain-sinclair-jon-gower/>>. It is perhaps worth noting that Sinclair's other work from this period has mostly received a second printing, but *Landor's Tower* has not.

was followed by a ban from speaking in a library in his adopted home territory of Hackney due to his anti-Olympics stance.²⁷

The only other significant mention of devolution in *Landor's Tower*, through the character of Norton, is also revealing: 'The closer to the cosmetic enhancement of the coastal strip, the marinas and Euro scams, the Millennial Stadium, the tokenist Welsh Assembly, the closer to outrage and perversion.'²⁸ The reference to the Welsh Assembly here is perhaps the most unambiguous statement in Sinclair's work about contemporary Welsh politics. Viewed in the context of what Sinclair would go on to describe as Wales's 'politics and double-tongued promotions',²⁹ it is a damning critique of contemporary Welsh politics and devolution (and bilingualism more generally), but it is also a statement whose irony is deliberately emphasised in its delivery through the character of Norton.³⁰ The Welsh Assembly was in only in its second year of operation at the time of writing (2000), but given the Assembly's relative novelty as a political institution, the use of the adjective 'tokenist' would appear more indicative of a criticism of the UK government, rather than the Assembly itself.

²⁷ See Iain Sinclair, 'Banned in Hackney - for going off-message about the Olympics', *The Guardian*, 22 October 2008 <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2008/oct/22/hackney-library-book-ban>>

²⁸ *Landor's Tower*, p.263. In Sinclair's research materials for *Landor's Tower*, there is a clipping of an article on the kind of grand project that he would later criticise in *Ghost Milk*, the development of the Cardiff Bay Barrage by the Cardiff Bay Development Corporation that receives criticism from Peter Finch in *Real Cardiff*. Folder: 'Research Materials', *Harry Ransom Center*. See Nicholas Schoon, 'Architecture: The price of turning mud into gold', *The Independent*, 11 May 1993 <<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/news/architecture-the-price-of-turning-mud-into-gold-cardiffs-new-seaside-plans-are-spectacular-but-do-2322377.html>>

²⁹ Iain Sinclair, 'Introduction,' Anthony Stokes, *The Valleys* (Bridgend: Seren, 2007), p. 6.

³⁰ It features a (presumably) deliberate misspelling of the Millennium stadium (now named the 'Principality' stadium).

Sinclair's relationship with funding bodies can be traced to the beginning of his writing career in both London and (briefly) Wales. Prior to the publication of *Landor's Tower*, Sinclair's writing made several references to the relationship between funding bodies and writers and artists. The long list of Sinclair's supplementary careers on his authorial blurbs make a virtue out of Sinclair's status as an outsider (untarnished by any obvious attachment to any perceived literary establishment). Sinclair's early correspondence with Vernon Watkins, a writer whose poetic output was managed alongside a career as a bank clerk, is analogous to Sinclair's early writing career (in which he used paid non-literary work to avoid reliance upon grant applications and mainstream publishers).³¹ It is a realisation that Robert Sheppard describes as Sinclair avoiding 'the double bind of being punished for remaining unpublicised by the very people who refuse to publish you.'³² Sinclair's early poetry collections effectively market his outsider status by meticulously revealing the mundanity of his career outside writing.

Sinclair's Welsh Publication History

Prior to Sinclair's inclusion in the *Green Horse* poetry anthology, his work had not been published in any Welsh journal or magazine other than Peter Finch's *second aeon* magazine (although at that time he had not yet published a full collection).³³ Following an initial

³¹ In what appears to be a formative early exchange with Robert Klinkert, with whom Sinclair made the Ginsberg film *Ah! Sunflower*, Klinkert writes: 'You have good and original ideas, although not from the economical point of view.' Letter from Robert Klinkert to Iain Sinclair, 27/03/1967, Folder: 'Klinkert, Robert', Harry Ransom Center.

³² Sheppard, *When Bad Times Made for Good Poetry: Episodes in the History of Poetic Innovation* (Exeter: Shearsman, 2011), p. 82.

³³ *Green Horse: An Anthology of Young Poets of Wales*. Sinclair and Finch's professional acquaintance was (outwardly) dormant until Sinclair accompanied Finch for the launch of

correspondence in 1969, Sinclair became a regular contributor to *second aeon* (his longest sustained publishing run in Wales), described in *Landor's Tower* as 'a counterculture publication that came out of Cardiff: pink covers, pulp paper, explosive typography.'³⁴ While Sinclair's initial correspondence with Finch is concerned with the opportunities for publication in Wales, he also seeks his advice in regard to funding for his work (and his fledgling publishing house).³⁵ Having asked Finch to provide him with a list of alternative poetry bookshops that he might be able to interest in the Albion Village Press catalogue, Sinclair writes to Finch with the following request:

Dear pete~ very quickly, in hope, of catching, you, before you reply, if you can & do,
to the request for bookshops ~ draw breath ~ CASH? ~ WELSH ARTS COUNCIL? ~
HOW?~ WHO?~ WHERE?~ can it be possible [...].³⁶

Sinclair's eagerness and hope quickly dissipates in the following letter in the exchange, in which Sinclair informs Finch that he is 'back to work to pay off debts. Welsh arts council for the welsh (resident only) – too bad'.³⁷ Sinclair's migration across the border into England is thus one with significant consequences for his early career as a writer. However, Sinclair's

the latest book in the *Real* series, *Real South Bank* (written by Chris McCabe, 2016). Chris McCabe, *Real South Bank* (Bridgend: Seren, 2016). Press release for the launch available here: <<http://www.southbankcentre.co.uk/whatson/iain-sinclair-and-chris-mccabe-98332>>

³⁴ *Landor's Tower*, p. 310.

³⁵ The correspondence is instigated by a letter from Sinclair to Finch, in which he writes: 'Dear Peter Finch, I'm Welsh, born Cardiff (lived London-Dublin-Gozo-London) but I've never had a line published in Wales & would like to [...]'. Fales Library Special Collections, New York University, Box 5, Folder 20, 29/01/1969, *second aeon* collection. It should be noted that 'second aeon' is deliberately not capitalised.

³⁶ Fales Library Special Collections, New York University, Box 5, Folder 20. Specific date unknown, circa November/December 1971.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 04 December 1971.

interest is not only in funding his own work, as he writes to Finch in a later exchange: 'Coming soon Chris Torrance's Welsh Sequence. Worth seeing. He should really get some kind of grant'.³⁸ Coincidentally, Torrance did indeed receive a Welsh Arts Council Bursary the year after publishing *Acrospirical Meanderings in a Tongue of the Time*, through Sinclair's Albion Village Press in 1973.³⁹ We might reconfigure Sinclair's absence from the Welsh poetry scene as not one of literary exile – and there is plenty of evidence to suggest that this is both how he views himself as well as being repeatedly asserted in his critical reception within Wales – but as an economic exile. His avant-gardist early poetry, and his insistence upon total control of his creative output was (he perceived) seemingly not suited to mainstream publishing, but his residence in London excluded him from participating in a Welsh publishing scene in which such poetry was flourishing and in which he had enjoyed early success.⁴⁰

Sinclair's disappointment at his ineligibility for Welsh Arts Council funding develops into a more general antipathy toward state funding, resulting from a perception (one that is heavily satirised by Sinclair himself) that he would need to alter the focus of his work to be eligible for a Welsh Arts Council grant (or even to move back to Wales). It is not the avant-

³⁸ Ibid, 14 September 1973.

³⁹ Chris Torrance, *Acrospirical Meanderings in a Tongue of the Time* (London: Albion Village Press, 1973). See <<http://www.literaturewales.org/writers-of-wales/i/129825/desc/torrance-chris/>>

⁴⁰ Robert Sheppard discusses the early productions of Albion Village Press in 'When Bad Times Made for Good Poetry: Iain Sinclair's *Autistic Poses*', in *When Bad Times Made for Good Poetry*, pp. 81-93. Matthew Jarvis's article 'An absent art? "Alternative" Poetry Since the Second Flowering', argues convincingly that the emergence of 'alternative' and Modernist poetries in Wales extended beyond *second aeon* and Peter Finch, *Poetry Wales* 44.1 (2008), pp. 8-13. Indeed, Torrance's *Acrospirical Meanderings in a Tongue of the Time*, and his later *Magic Door: A Cycle, Book 1* (London: Albion Village Press, 1975), are both clearly avant-garde as well as distinctly 'Welsh'.

garde nature of his early work that precludes Sinclair from funding, but a combination of his residence in London and his work's seeming lack of Welsh themes or settings (the latter of which is an insinuation that the following section of this chapter will address). However, funding bodies feature regularly throughout Sinclair's work, and are not restricted to the Welsh Arts Council. Also, Sinclair's attitude toward funding was not only apparent in private correspondence. Striking an emancipatory note in 'Heart's Eye: A Table Top Manifesto' (in *Red Eye*, 1973), Sinclair distances himself from the conditions required by national funding bodies and institutions: 'We are no longer waiting on the edict of the pyramid: Arts Council, *Time Out*, BBC. Some snake-mouth, print excreting giant sloth'.⁴¹ Ezra Pound's famous exclamation might, in Sinclair's words, become the more immediate 'Make it Now!'⁴²

The lampooning of Yr Academi Gymreig in *Landor's Tower* is not simply reflective of an antipathy toward the 'national' literature of Wales, but of a more generally-held rejection of grant-aided literature and culture. The funding available for Welsh writers who were still Welsh-resident (those that are 'doing their bit'), was not applicable to Sinclair following his move to London and, as a consequence of establishing Albion Village Press (through which he effectively self-published most of his early poetry collections), the need or desire to publish in Wales became of less importance to him.

⁴¹ Iain Sinclair, 'Heart's Eye: A Table Top Manifesto', *Red Eye* (London: Test Centre, 2013), p. 68. Originally written 1973, and prepared for publication by Albion Village Press in 1974, but not released due to other commitments.

⁴² Ezra Pound, *Make It New* (London: Faber and Faber, 1934)

Publishing through my own small press gave me a measure of control over output.

As well as a conscious attempt to register London places and local specifics, the somatic undertow tugged me back to Wales.⁴³

Sinclair's work has continually been politically engaged in a way that is not often acknowledged,⁴⁴ but the mode of his late-twentieth-century writing – psychogeography – renders extensive political engagement beyond the bounds of specific geographies almost redundant. In an early essay he writes of 'History factored through geography, not textual propaganda or arbitrary sponsorship'.⁴⁵ Sinclair's mantra that 'geography is now a matter of politics' could easily be extended to much of Sinclair's work.⁴⁶

Paratexts

As his only distinctly Welsh novel, the publication of *Landor's Tower* saw Sinclair characterised as a 'returning exile', a term used by Nicholas Murray in his review of *Landor's Tower* for *Planet*.⁴⁷ His status as an exile is a significant factor in the reception, or lack thereof, of Sinclair's work in Wales prior to the publication of *Landor's Tower*. Sinclair alludes to this problem in his most recent Wales-published work, *Our Unknown Everywhere*:

Arthur Machen as Presence:

⁴³ *Black Apples of Gower*, p. 70

⁴⁴ For example, *Downriver* not only features a fictionalised version of Margaret Thatcher, the 'Widow', but also a corrupt and sexually deviant MP, Meic Triscombe. It might be worth noting that Sinclair uses the Welsh spelling of the forename.

⁴⁵ 'Heart's Eye: A Table Top Manifesto', *Red Eye*, p. 70.

⁴⁶ Sinclair uses this phrase in an unpublished version of his review of Niall Griffiths's *Sheepshagger* for the *Independent on Sunday*. Document, 'Sinclair: Review of Niall Griffiths, *Sheepshagger*', Harry Ransom Center.

⁴⁷ Nicholas Murray, 'A Triumph of Language', *Planet*, 148 (2001), 93–4, p. 94.

I tried to do a Welsh book of my own, *Landor's Tower*. It was not a critical or popular success. The Welsh didn't like it, and everybody else thought I should stick to writing about London, but nevertheless I enjoyed the process of attempting it.⁴⁸

The language Sinclair uses here casts 'Welsh' as an unfamiliar other. His use of the phrase 'a Welsh book' is anachronistic; it suggests a ventriloquistic Welsh writing, rather than simply the use of a Welsh setting. The definite article preceding 'Welsh' in the third sentence emphasises the distance between Sinclair and Wales: he does not identify himself as one of 'The Welsh'. This distancing is a familiar (and somewhat paradoxical) technique in Sinclair's writing, the consequence of a frequent borderlessness between his fiction and non-fiction. It also creates a binary opposition between Sinclair's Welsh text and his other, presumably non-Welsh texts; an opposition that is unstable when considering his other texts' Welsh elements, and denotes a simplistic understanding of what constitutes an (English language) Welsh text.

Interestingly, Sinclair pre-empts the criticism that he 'should stick to writing about London' in *Landor's Tower*: 'I had the potential, so they said, to become a W.H. Davies super-tramp with a diploma in psychogeography; now I was damned for sticking too long to the same midden, riverine London'.⁴⁹ Consequently, *Landor's Tower* might be read as an expression of Sinclair's frustration at being continually categorised as a London-writer, although it is

⁴⁸ Iain Sinclair, *Our Unknown Everywhere: Arthur Machen as Presence* (Talybont: Y Lolfa, on behalf of Three Impostors Press, 2013), p. 25.

⁴⁹ Sinclair, *Landor's Tower*, p. 26. Sinclair refers to the interruption of his London project in *Landor's Tower* explicitly: 'Where was the last place anyone who knew me, my perverse and obsessive passion for London, would begin a search? The town in which I had been born, the territory I had lived in for twenty years, the memory pit' (*Landor's Tower*, p. 259).

perhaps the success of his assimilation that is his real concern. In an unaired interview for a BBC radio documentary on the Welsh language, 'The Dragon with Two Tongues', Sinclair indicates an admiration for Roy Jenkins, whom Sinclair describes as 'sound[ing] more English than anybody English', adding that 'the Welsh have a way of infiltrating English society at all levels very successfully. The invasions are going both ways.'⁵⁰ In the context of Sinclair's statements on his exilic status within both London and Wales, his suggestion that the 'invasions are going both ways' becomes a statement of a personal ambition, rather than simply a recognition of the ability of others to cross borders more successfully than he can. In contrast to Jan Morris's opposite movement across the border – and her conscious assimilation into Welsh nationalist politics – Sinclair's covert 'invasion' of London places him in a doubly-ostracised position. Neither willing to overtly adapt his identity to that of an Englishman (as Morris becomes 'electively Welsh'), nor willing to shed his Welsh identity in order to assimilate, Sinclair retains his exilic status.

Crucially, *Landor's Tower* was not actually the first instance in which a Sinclair text referred to the author as either Welsh or 'born in Wales' (although it was the first *novel* in which this statement appeared, a key distinction highlighted by Thomas and Aaron). Echoes of this biographical detail resonate throughout many of Sinclair's authorial blurbs, but what is significant is the way in which the information is altered in a chronologically inconsistent manner. The characterisation of Sinclair as a 'returning exile' is in contrast to the inconsistent biographical information provided in his books; 'born in Wales' has not featured in any of Sinclair's blurbs since *Landor's Tower*. This key phrase (and its subsequent

⁵⁰ 'The Dragon with Two Tongues', *BBC Radio 3*, 28 October 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01nj7ff> This transcript is reproduced with the kind permission of Iain Sinclair and the programme's producer, Martin Williams.

disappearance) accumulates in significance when discussed, to use Gerard Genette's terminology, as a component of *Landor's Tower's* 'paratexts':

[Paratexts] surround [the text] and extend it, precisely in order to *present* it, in the usual sense of the verb but also in the strongest sense: to *make present*, to ensure the text's presence in the world, its 'reception' and consumption in the form (nowadays, at least) of a book.⁵¹

Sinclair's texts display a detailed attention to and manipulation of the potential of the physical form of the book, including its paratexts. As an ex-book dealer and publisher (two professions that Sinclair's authorial blurbs often identify), Sinclair's texts subvert their physical potential, prompting a heightened awareness in a reader of their marginal aspects. Sinclair's early career work clearly identifies him as a writer who exists outside of (or even in spite of) any Welsh literary scene. In this regard, the 'born in Wales' phrase in *Landor's Tower* is especially significant, both in its original intention as well as its potential for misinterpretation. It could also, for example, be viewed as a reductive indicator of only a biological or geographical connection to Wales, absolving the author of the need to connect in more meaningful ways with Welsh literary culture. Brian Baker has rightly pointed out that 'a recurrent (yet hardly remarked upon critically) motif in Sinclair's work is the importance of the book as a physical object', and also makes the connection between 'the book as a material object [and] Sinclair's history as a dealer in books'.⁵² This argument could be extended to incorporate Sinclair's paratexts as an important element of his work. It is

⁵¹ Gerard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 1.

⁵² Brian Baker, *Iain Sinclair* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p. 118

through such a discussion that Sinclair's national identity, indeed his *Welshness*, can be seen to exist as a paratextual presence, rather than a simple biographical detail.⁵³

In *Paratexts*, Genette emphasises the potential in exploring the liminal areas of a text that are intrinsic to its production. These paratexts are what enable a 'text to become a book and to be offered as such to its readers and, more generally, to the public'.⁵⁴ Paratexts, Genette contends, occupy 'a privileged place of a pragmatics and a strategy'. The paratext is made up of the 'peritext' and 'epitext', the former signifying 'within the volume', the latter 'located outside the book'.⁵⁵ A reading of Sinclair's paratexts becomes especially significant for two reasons. First, Sinclair's peritexts provide useful 'thresholds' (Genette's term) within the geographical work his text is conducting; by this I mean both the geography of the page (the space of the text), as a reflection of Sinclair's open-field poetics, and the physical geography to which his texts refer (the space in the text). In this case Sinclair's 'Welshness' is twice marginalised: at the level of textual content as well as that of formal presentation. Second, Sinclair's epitexts are particularly important when considered in the context of his book-dealing past. This connection was made in a recent interview with Tim Burrows that appeared in *The Quietus*: 'Sinclair is a compromised yet industrious yes man, giving interviews away like they are going out of fashion [...] His eagerness to promote is a legacy from his years in the book trade'.⁵⁶ I would contend that Sinclair's 'strategy' manifests in his

⁵³ Sinclair's books themselves represent a complex literary geography, and Sinclair's own paratextual presence on the back covers of other Welsh authors (such as Niall Griffiths's *Sheepshagger* (London: Vintage, 2002), and Lloyd Jones's *Mr Vogel* (Bridgend: Seren, 2004) themselves signify a complex series of border crossings by exiles and incomers alike.

⁵⁴ Genette, *Paratexts*, p. 1.

⁵⁵ Genette, *Paratexts*, pp. 4–5.

⁵⁶ Tim Burrows, "'A Living Memory": Iain Sinclair on Life At 70,' *The Quietus*, 6 June 2014, <<http://thequietus.com/articles/15457-iain-sinclair-interview-2>>

peritexts, in particular his deployment of different biographies, as well as subtitles (which are frequently omitted from his books' covers), creating a deep textual topography signified by both text and paratext. Additionally, Sinclair's epitexts serve the paradoxical function of both elucidating and problematising his texts. The inclusion of a quotation from David Jones' *Anathemata* as an epigraph to a chapter in *Downriver* suggests intertextual interplay between Sinclair and Jones, one that contributes to his Welsh *mythos*. However, in a manner typical of Sinclair's narrative's elusiveness, the quotation does not directly correlate with the chapter that it precedes. As Sinclair writes in another of his seemingly non-Welsh books, *London Orbital*:

[David Jones] is a pivotal figure in my own Welsh mythos. Jones is fractured by war, spiritual crisis, the impossibility of knitting together strands, whispers of Celtic, Roman and contemporary history.⁵⁷

This impossibility is a central theme in Sinclair's texts, and one that he explores consistently when writing about London. Sinclair's publishing career, specifically his early interest in publishing Chris Torrance's *Magic Door* cycle (to which I will refer later in this chapter), also plays an important role in this project.⁵⁸

There is a complexity to Sinclair's relationship with London – both as publisher and writer – that is deeply influenced by his relationship with Wales and its writing. Richard Jones, in a profile of Sinclair in *Planet* magazine that coincided with the publication of *Landor's Tower*

⁵⁷ Iain Sinclair, *London Orbital* (London: Granta, 2002), p. 369.

⁵⁸ *Magic Door: A Cycle, Book 1*.

(2001), suggests that '[f]rom the Welsh perspective, Iain Sinclair's persona, despite thirty-plus years of published work, has been slow in developing. For most of this time his Welsh origins had been of small importance to him'.⁵⁹ Later in the same piece Jones writes that '[n]owadays Sinclair feels closer to his past Welsh life', an unsurprising statement given that *Londor's Tower*, the book Sinclair was promoting at the time, was predominantly set in South Wales, where he was raised.⁶⁰ Jones's statement proved to be only partially prescient; although Sinclair has not published another book set in Wales since *Londor's Tower*, he has published a number of texts set outside of, or that gesture away from, London. *London Orbital*, a book about walking along the M25 (the periphery of London) that followed *Londor's Tower* in 2002, continued this pattern. *American Smoke* (2013), which follows the journeys of several Beat writers, extends this movement outwards and away from London. In 2015, he published two books that were evidence of both a return to London and a continuation of Sinclair's Welsh project (or a return to Wales and a continuation of Sinclair's London project), *London Overground*, and *Black Apples of Gower*.⁶¹

Nonetheless, the potential for critical study in the area of Sinclair and Wales has gone largely unexplored. The two major single-author studies of Sinclair's prose, by Brian Baker and Robert Bond, attempt no sustained analysis of the matter of Sinclair and Wales, even

⁵⁹ Jones, 'A Welshman disguised as a Londoner', p. 55.

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 56. Jones also paraphrases an unattributed radio interview in which Sinclair describes himself 'as a Welshman disguised as a Londoner', the quotation used for the article's title alerting readers to Sinclair's Welsh roots.

⁶¹ Iain Sinclair, *London Overground: A Day's Walk Around the Ginger Line* (St. Ives: Hamish Hamilton, 2015); *Black Apples of Gower: Stone Footing in Memory Fields* (Dorset: Little Toller, 2015).

though both were published in the wake of *Landor's Tower*.⁶² In the context of devolution in Wales, a process whose most significant moments have arguably occurred in his absence (the 1979 and 1997 referenda), Sinclair's exilic status appears to have led to his work being little discussed within Wales, in both its magazines and academic publications. In one of the few Welsh publications in which Sinclair has been involved – his introduction to Anthony Stokes' photography collection, *The Valleys* (2007) – he writes:

Better, I found, to explore London as an overwhelmed Celtic camp than to wrestle with the matter of contemporary Wales, its politics and double-tongued promotions. It can't be done from outside. And you are expelled, make no mistake, as soon as you step on the train to Paddington.⁶³

Brian Baker suggests that Sinclair's lack of political or cultural engagement is a reflection of his adherence to an apolitical neo-modernist poetic; that Sinclair's writing displays a 'scepticism towards political activity [...] that aligns him with a postmodern "politics of the self" [which] tends to effectively undermine a material critique of contemporary Britain'.⁶⁴ There is some truth to this characterisation of Sinclair's writing, and certainly any sustained textual engagement with the processes of devolution and 'the matter of contemporary Wales' is largely foregone in both his fiction and non-fiction.⁶⁵ Sinclair's critique of

⁶² Baker, *Iain Sinclair*; Robert Bond, *Iain Sinclair* (Cambridge: Salt, 2005). Kevin Jackson's series of interviews, *The Verbals* (Tonbridge: Worple Press, 2003), does begin with a detailed discussion with Sinclair about his childhood in Wales, in particular an early meeting with Vernon Watkins.

⁶³ Iain Sinclair, 'Introduction,' Anthony Stokes, *The Valleys* (Bridgend: Seren, 2007), p. 6.

⁶⁴ Baker, *Iain Sinclair*, p. 9.

⁶⁵ Although as with the un-filmed 'Doctor', a politics of the self doesn't necessarily preclude Sinclair's work totally from material political engagement.

contemporary Britain, if present, has remained largely covert (although the admiration for Roy Jenkins cited earlier indicates a degree of engagement with Welsh politics). However, the consequences of devolution have, as Thomas and Aaron note, had wider consequences for Sinclair's reception within Wales.

I would suggest that Sinclair's withdrawal from the politics of Wales is two-tiered. Primarily, his neo-modernist 'politics of the self' *does* indicate a withdrawal from political discourse: in his introduction to the *Conductors of Chaos* poetry anthology Sinclair alludes to this, writing that 'the work I value is that which seems most remote, alienated, fractured'.⁶⁶ However, there is a secondary tier to Sinclair's political engagement that occasionally subordinates the first, and is more indebted to his psychogeographical technique: he engages with political discourse when his material geography (his *territory*) requires it. Sinclair's criticisms of the London 2012 Olympics development were the subject of his most politically engaged book, *Ghost Milk: Calling Time on the Grand Project*, but these criticisms were instigated by the material effects of 'grand projects' on their geographical environments, and Sinclair's attempts to walk through these increasingly militarised territories.⁶⁷ In this way, Sinclair's political commentary can be seen to be a form of trespassing. When *Ghost Milk* received a nomination for 'Wales Book of the Year' award (the only significant prize for which he has been shortlisted in Wales), Sinclair responded in *Wales Online* with a short piece about his Welsh roots and their significance to his adult-life in London:

⁶⁶ Iain Sinclair, 'Introduction,' in Iain Sinclair, ed., *Conductors of Chaos: A Poetry Anthology* (London: Picador, 1996), p. xvii.

⁶⁷ Iain Sinclair, *Ghost Milk: Calling Time on the Grand Project* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2011).

I drifted to London, as so many do, settling in Hackney. Where I have stayed. Same borough, same house. With the underlying conviction that London is workable, as soon as you accept that it is a Celtic city, a branch line of the Mabinogion.⁶⁸

This is a theme that permeates much of Sinclair's work on London; indeed, the title of his breakthrough poetry collection, *Lud Heat*, alludes to the mythological Celtic pre-history of London. The trope of London as a Celtic city is a thread to which Sinclair returns in *Our Unknown Everywhere*. In the following quotation, Sinclair begins by inverting the idea of Wales as a postcolonial nation:

I've always thought of London as a Welsh colony [...] the myths of Geoffrey of Monmouth, all of that: the buried head of Bran at Tower Hill, the doings of King Ludd. 'And Ludd ruled prosperously, and rebuilt the walls of London, and encompassed it with numberless towers [...] And he dwelt therein most part of the year, and therefore was it called Caer Ludd, and at last Caer London. And after the stranger-race came there, it was called London, or Lwndrys.'⁶⁹

This idea echoes throughout his essay on Machen: 'The Welsh spill out into London as a "stranger-race" and use it as a remote but necessary extension of Wales: they never throw off the ground of origin, but they can't live there'.⁷⁰ When asked in an interview for *The Quietus* about what it means to be a 'Londoner', Sinclair replied: '[e]veryone from London is from somewhere else at some point, but there are definite advantages to arriving with

⁶⁸ Iain Sinclair, cited in 'Notes from a Welsh book prize'.

⁶⁹ Sinclair, *Our Unknown Everywhere*, p. 22.

⁷⁰ Sinclair, *Our Unknown Everywhere*, pp. 22–3.

baggage from somewhere else. It makes you a little wide-eyed about what London is, rather than that eternal cannibalising of London [...].⁷¹ Evidently, Sinclair attaches a degree of importance to his position as an outsider in London, though he also estranges London by depicting it as a fundamentally (originally) Welsh city.

When considering the reception of *Landor's Tower* in Wales, it could be argued that it has acted as a barrier to the study of Sinclair and 'the matter of Wales'. Referring to the novel's caustic language, Thomas and Aaron suggest that *Landor's Tower* 'can hardly be said to cast lustre on the Welsh character'.⁷² Nicholas Murray, in his otherwise positive review, acknowledges that '[s]ome will find Sinclair's pen too little dipped in empathy' noting of one passage that '[it] mounts to a crescendo of indictment that will be too strong for some Welsh stomachs'; although he prefaces this with the caveat that '[i]t is no part of Sinclair's mission to ingratiate himself with the Welsh'.⁷³ Brian Baker suggests that throughout *Landor's Tower* Sinclair is 'relentlessly representing the Welsh through somewhat scurrilous caricature if not with outright hostility', and that 'it might be said of *Landor's Tower* that Sinclair identifies with the Welsh least of all ethnic or national communities'.⁷⁴ Criticism of *Landor's Tower's* treatment of Wales wasn't confined to Welsh publications. In his review for the *Guardian*, Iain Penman appears bemused by Sinclair's attitude towards Hay-on-Wye, writing that: 'The only thing Sinclair seems truly to engage with as a topic is Hay-on-Wye, which is set up, not once but an unbelievable and unendurable twice, for the topographical

⁷¹ Burrows, "'A Living Memory": Iain Sinclair on Life At 70'

⁷² Thomas and Aaron, 'Pulling you through changes', p. 300.

⁷³ Nicholas Murray, 'A Triumph of Language', p. 94.

⁷⁴ Baker, *Iain Sinclair*, pp. 166–167.

equivalent of character assassination.’⁷⁵ Rather than Sinclair’s controversial stereotyping of the locals as identified by reviewers in Wales, Penman takes issue with Sinclair’s ‘topographical [...] character assassination’ of Hay. However, the following exchange with William Lyttle, the Hackney ‘Mole Man’, from Sinclair’s *Hackney, That Rose-Red Empire*, reframes his caricaturist stereotypes of ‘the Welsh’ as an ironic reflection of the cultural xenophobia he himself has experienced:

‘Are you an Englishman then?’

‘Certainly not.’

‘Book writer is it? A Taffy?’

[...]

Remarks thrown back over William’s shoulder were of a racist tinge. I felt no shame in letting them pass, there have been no prosecutions, as yet, for those who are rude about the Welsh. Our nation has become a comedy stereotype: stupid, drunk, fat and probably gay. The valleys of South Wales – line-dancing, fast-food binging – stand in, as far as the metropolitan media are concerned, for America. Much safer to mock the disenfranchised tribes of the near-west than the global bully.⁷⁶

The elements of fiction in Sinclair’s non-fiction, and *vice versa*, render any attempt to isolate a single textual Sinclair “presence” unstable. The empathetic, Welsh-identified Sinclair (who speaks of ‘our nation’) of *Hackney* provides an alternate perspective to the Sinclair of

⁷⁵ ‘A Magus Marooned’, *The Guardian*, 5 May 2001,
<<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2001/may/05/fiction.reviews>>

⁷⁶ Iain Sinclair, *Hackney, That Rose-Red Empire: A Confidential Report* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2009), pp. 413–4.

Landor's Tower, whose 'crescendo of indictment' of 'the Welsh' was 'too strong for some Welsh stomachs'. However, one must also be wary of creating a false dichotomy between the empathetic Sinclair of the above passage and the caustic narrator of *Landor's Tower*. Sinclair's multiple, ironic self-characterisations render any attempt to identify a singular authorial perspective impossible.

While the publication of *Landor's Tower* resulted in a temporary increase in features and reviews of Sinclair's work in both *Planet* and *New Welsh Review* (as well as a contribution to a *Poetry Wales* feature on Dylan Thomas in 2003), this interest has not transferred to Welsh academic publications.⁷⁷ Articles and books on Sinclair and his work have only been included in one annual critical bibliography in the main academic journal on Welsh writing in English.⁷⁸ Given that Robert Macfarlane estimated in 2004 that Sinclair was 'among the most written-about of contemporary British authors', it would appear that very little of this writing emerges from Wales.⁷⁹ Although *Ghost Milk* was nominated for Wales Book of the Year (in the English-language non-fiction category), it was the only nominated text not to be reviewed in either *Planet* or *New Welsh Review*. Nevertheless, Sinclair's career prior to the moment of his first major (literary) contact with Wales suggests potential for an alternate understanding of an author who has rarely, and if so only peripherally, featured in discussions of contemporary Welsh writing in English.

⁷⁷ Iain Sinclair, 'Dylan Thomas: The Breakfast Suite', *Poetry Wales* 39/2 (2003), p. 50.

⁷⁸ See *Almanac: Yearbook of Welsh Writing in English*, 13 (2009).

⁷⁹ Robert Macfarlane, 'Iain Sinclair's struggles with the city of London', *The Guardian*, 15 July 2011, <<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2011/jul/15/ghost-milk-iain-sinclair-olympics>>

The presence of London in Sinclair's work is entwined with both his writing practice and his subject matter. Sinclair's early poetry evinces a method to which walking (specifically the traversal of marginal spaces), and autobiography, are both intrinsic – particularly in his later, idiosyncratic interpretation of psychogeography. Due to Sinclair's work's focus on London – specifically the East End – he has often been categorised as an English writer. In fact, in the volume *Literary Devolution: Writing Now in Scotland, Ireland, Wales and England* (1997) – an anthology of the critical and creative output from each of the four nations of Great Britain in the run up to the devolution referenda in Scotland and Wales – Sinclair appears as a representative of English poetry.⁸⁰ This is not merely indicative of his being published in England (or by an English publisher), as Gwyneth Lewis (published by Bloodaxe), features in the contemporary English-language Welsh poetry section. Nor is this the only occasion in which Sinclair has been anthologised as an English writer. *New Directions 32* (1976), a selection compiled by Andrew Crozier entitled *Ten English Poets*, features Sinclair.⁸¹ However, Sinclair is not alone in being misrepresented here. John James, the Cardiff-born avant-garde poet whose *Welsh Poems* were published in 1967, and Chris Torrance, the Scottish-born, London-raised poet who had been active in the what was once referred to as the Anglo-Welsh poetry scene since the late 1960s, are both included.⁸² The first three books of Torrance's *Magic Door* sequence were published by Sinclair's Albion Village Press, and Sinclair writes of this venture:

⁸⁰ Elinor S. Shaffer, ed., *Literary Devolution: Writing Now in Scotland, Ireland, Wales and England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). Sinclair's contribution, 'Careful the Horse's Bite', is taken from his (then) most recent book, *Slow Chocolate Autopsy* (London: Phoenix, 1997).

⁸¹ *New Directions 32: Ten English Poets*, ed. Andrew Crozier (New York: New Directions, 1976).

⁸² John James, *The Welsh Poems* (Lincoln: Grosseteste Press, 1967); Chris Torrance, *The Magic Door: A Cycle, Book 1*.

Once the site of childhood, the topography of the original dream, has been left behind, the way to recover Wales is by refraction: the recognition of other poets, other photographers who travel in the opposite direction, to carry out projects the emigrants have left behind [...] I recognised [Torrance was] a writer who was doing a job I was incapable of undertaking. Or even attempting. The best I could offer was to publish, from London, his first three Welsh books'.⁸³

Sinclair's promotion of Welsh writing, and his tacit acknowledgement of the difficulty that he would later have in attempting his own 'Welsh book', gives evidence of a commitment to the writing of Wales that began significantly prior to the publication of his first book about Wales.

Two years after Crozier's *Ten English Poets* (and only one year prior to the devolution referendum of 1979), Meic Stephens and Peter Finch included Sinclair in the anthology *Green Horse: An Anthology of Young Poets of Wales*, his only appearance in an anthology of English-language Welsh poetry.⁸⁴ Roland Matthias's introduction to the anthology refers to Sinclair and John James as poets 'whose contact with Wales in adult life has been comparatively slight and from whom any deep commitment to the Welsh heritage would be a surprise'.⁸⁵ Two poems by Sinclair appear in the volume, the first, 'Out of the Cycle', is taken from *Lud Heat*, the Celtic aspects of which were mentioned earlier. The second is an early poem entitled 'West, light', from a series based on 'a lot of lengthy pilgrimage walks

⁸³ Sinclair, 'Introduction,' Stokes, *The Valleys*, p. 6.

⁸⁴ *Green Horse Anthology*.

⁸⁵ Roland Mathias, 'Introduction,' in Stephens and Finch, eds., *Green Horse*, p. 19.

on the Ridgeway, or from Salisbury to Glastonbury to Cadbury Castle'.⁸⁶ Intriguingly, Sinclair ends the poem with the couplet: 'what hills, Wales/ the distance'.⁸⁷ In the most recent edition of *Suicide Bridge* (2013), which for the first time includes an original section entitled 'The Westering' (which includes 'West, light'), the final line is subtly, but significantly, altered to 'what hills, Wales/ the clear distance'.⁸⁸ This revised couplet suggests a nuanced awareness of the increasing impact of Sinclair's distance from Wales.

Sinclair's third publication, the poetry collection *Muscat's Würm* (1972), had an intriguing structure upon which Finch remarked, in his review for *second aeon*, 'its [sic] split into sections that might be of more significance to the poet than to me'.⁸⁹ In a letter to Finch thanking him for the positive review of the collection, Sinclair writes that 'each section relates to various coal levels in a geological chart of the Maesteg coal-field. Various depths dredged in an attempt to re-enter the mythology of my own past and placement'.⁹⁰ While the surface content of *Muscat's Würm* is evidently not about Wales, the poet claims that the foundations of the collection, though disguised, are built on a distinctly Welsh structure.

⁸⁶ Iain Sinclair, *Lud Heat: A Book of the Dead Hamlets – May 1974 to April 1975* (London: Albion Village Press, 1975); Steven Barfield, 'Psychogeography: Will Self and Iain Sinclair in conversation with Kevin Jackson,' transcription by Karian Schuitema, *The Literary London Journal* (March 2008), <<http://www.literarylondon.org/london-journal/march2008/sinclair-self.html>>

⁸⁷ Iain Sinclair, 'West, light', in *Green Horse*, p. 180. Papers deposited in the Meic Stephens archive in the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth indicate that the biographies of poets *were* collected and used to determine the eligibility of submissions on the basis of age, place of birth, and length of residence in Wales.

⁸⁸ Iain Sinclair, *Suicide Bridge: A Book of the Furies, a Mythology of the South and East* (Cheltenham: Skylight Press, 2013).

⁸⁹ Iain Sinclair, *Muscat's Würm* (London: Albion Village Press, 1972). Peter Finch, review of *Muscat's Würm*, in *second aeon*, 16/7 (1973), p. 222.

⁹⁰ Fales Library Special Collections, New York University, Box 5, Folder 20, 3 April 1973, *second aeon* collection. This transcript is reproduced with the kind permission of both Fales Library, New York, and Iain Sinclair.

The various sections of *Muscat's Würm* correspond directly with the layers of coal in the charts above (for example: 'Clay Vein', and 'Lower Black Band'). That Sinclair was attempting to render his personal mythology through poetry as early as 1972, even covertly, displays a 'deep[er] commitment to the Welsh heritage' than has traditionally been recognised.

In 1997, the year in which Sinclair's reputation became synonymous with non-fiction with *Lights Out for the Territory* (and hence a significant year in the development of Sinclair's public persona), he responded to an interviewer's description of him as an 'English renegade', stating: 'I'm not English. I'm Welsh/Scottish. I don't have a drop of English. I'm in permanent exile. I'm a spy, a kind of virus that's been working away quietly for years'.⁹¹ While the term 'Londoner' may be more appropriate, Sinclair himself subverts this categorisation, referring to himself as 'a Welshman disguised as a Londoner'.⁹² This disguise becomes especially pertinent in light of *Muscat's Würm*, which might be read as a Welsh poem disguised as a London poem. In a review of Sinclair's most recent book *American Smoke* (2013) in *New Welsh Review*, Sinclair is described as the more geographically specific 'Hackney Laureate', in reference to the specific site of Sinclair's home (which initially served as the base for his Albion Village Press).⁹³ In the same issue, a review of Sinclair's poetry

⁹¹ Iain Sinclair, *Lights Out for the Territory*. Sinclair cited in Anonymous, 'Return of the Reforgotten,' *Vertigo* 1/7 (1997), <https://www.closeupfilmcentre.com/vertigo_magazine/volume-1-issue-7-autumn-1997/return-of-the-reforgotten/>. This is not the only instance of mistaken national identity. Will Self, Sinclair's contemporary psychogeographer (and occasional collaborator), pointedly labels Sinclair as 'that Celtic Englishman' in the introduction to his first *Psychogeography* collection, from Will Self, *Psychogeography* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), p. 13.

⁹² Cited in Richard Jones, 'A Welshman disguised as a Londoner: a Profile of Iain Sinclair by Richard Jones', *Planet*, 148 (2001), 55–60, p. 56. The original phrase is attributed an unspecified radio interview with Sinclair promoting *Londor's Tower*.

⁹³ Paul Cooper, 'Review of *American Smoke*,' *New Welsh Review*, 103 (2014), pp. 78–79.

collection *Red Eye* (published in 2013 but originally composed in 1973), refers to him as both 'Britain's laureate of urban landscapes' and 'one of *our* most interesting writers' (my emphasis), the possessive pronoun implying that Sinclair belongs to Wales.⁹⁴ The assumption that because Sinclair writes about London he must identify as English has not been as prevalent since the publication of *Landor's Tower*. However, as recently as 2005 Nick Rennison, in his book *Contemporary British Novelists* (2005), addresses any potential for confusion by stating that 'Iain Sinclair was born, not in London, but in Wales in 1943'.⁹⁵

The marginalisation of Sinclair in the field of Welsh writing in English is perhaps understandable given that, with the exception of *Landor's Tower*, his work doesn't lend itself easily to categorisation as 'Welsh'. However, I would suggest that Wales does indeed have a marginal, *textual*, presence in much of his London prose, as well as his poetry. Hitchins's argument for the nomination of *Downriver* as a great *Welsh* novel does not rely on the place of Sinclair's birth (Cardiff, though he was raised in Maesteg); nor does it identify or emphasise any particular Welsh themes within the novel. Instead, Hitchins suggests that *Downriver* 'is a Welsh novel that is not bound by borders, whether of nation, identity or form'.⁹⁶ This statement is, however, somewhat reductive, and one could counter that the novel *is* bound by topographic borders: its topographical structure, reflected in twelve distinct sections, is its most decipherable component. Hitchins is right to note that the novel's Welshness, or rather its legitimacy to be considered a great Welsh novel, should not depend on such 'static' and reductive binaries. However, *Downriver* itself does contain significant Welsh elements, such as the epigraph from David Jones's *Anathemata*, and

⁹⁴ Paul Cooper, 'Review of *Red Eye*,' *New Welsh Review*, 103 (2014), pp. 80–82.

⁹⁵ Nick Rennison, *Contemporary British Novelists* (Oxford: Routledge, 2005), p. 125.

⁹⁶ Hitchins, 'The Greatest Welsh Novel'.

references to Blodeuwedd and Lleu from the *Mabinogion*, as well as the legendary dog 'Gelert the Faithful'.⁹⁷ In one of his more significant adaptations of Welsh mythology, the pub featured in *Downriver* is named 'The Spear of Destiny' in an allusion to the spear crafted to kill Lleu by Gronw Pebr in the Fourth Branch of the Mabinogi, and the gun stolen from behind its bar is used in the elaborate suicide of Arthur Singleton: 'One foot clung to the platform, the other searched for the neck of the roebuck. It was foretold: only the Triple Death of Llew Llaw Gyffes could release him'.⁹⁸ Such detailed and original use of the Fourth Branch reveals in Sinclair both a nuanced engagement with a seminal Welsh mythological text, as well as an ability to weave such mythology relatively seamlessly into an otherwise accurately represented London topography (in which no such pub as 'The Spear of Destiny' exists or has existed). It is also evidence of Sinclair's writing being engaged with Wales and Welsh literary traditions prior to the publication of *Landor's Tower*.

What Hitchins clearly demonstrates is that an argument for a more thorough consideration of Sinclair as a contemporary Welsh writer should not need to depend upon *Landor's Tower* for legitimisation – indeed, Hitchins makes no mention *Landor's Tower* at all in his article. However, Hitchins does not address the need to consider the recognisably Welsh aspects of *Downriver* (and, by extension, Sinclair's novels both before and after *Landor's Tower*). Such an omission is potentially reductive, and occludes a significant proportion of Sinclair's work that, while set in London, contains and projects a sustained engagement with his Welsh roots, and his continued interest in English-language Welsh authors (evidenced by his recent

⁹⁷ See Sinclair, *Downriver*, pp. 77, 78, 215.

⁹⁸ Sinclair, *Downriver*, p. 216. The 'Spear of Destiny' metaphor also refers to the Lance of Longinus, the spear that pierced the side of Jesus on the cross.

endorsements of Lloyd Jones and Niall Griffiths).⁹⁹ Thus *Landor's Tower*, categorised by Sinclair as his 'Welsh' book, should not be viewed as Sinclair's only exploration of his Welsh identity.

In contrast to Hitchens' description of Sinclair as a 'nomadic' writer, Thomas and Aaron's article refers to Sinclair in rather more fixed terms as a 'London-based and London-identified writer'. While 'London-based' is a correct observation of Sinclair's residence in Hackney for almost the entirety of his professional writing career, the meaning of 'London-identified' is rather more difficult to ascertain, referring either to Sinclair's self-identification with London (affirmed by his residence therein), or to the public perception of Sinclair as a London writer; or indeed, both. Sinclair has dispelled any notion that he self-identifies with his particular place of residence, stating that he doesn't 'feel any deep connection with Hackney'; hence I would contend that 'London-identified' is predominantly a matter of public perception.¹⁰⁰ While Thomas and Aaron repeat the assertion that it was not until the publication of *Landor's Tower* in 2001 that Sinclair first identified himself as 'born in Wales', the more geographically specific phrase 'born and raised in South Wales' precedes the publication of *Landor's Tower*, making its initial appearance in Sinclair's authorial blurb for *Slow Chocolate Autopsy* (1997), a graphic novel collaboration with the artist Dave McKean (who also illustrated *Landor's Tower*).¹⁰¹ *Literary Devolution's* 'Notes to the Contributors' section also states that Sinclair was 'born in South Wales', adding that he is 'the son of a

⁹⁹ Sinclair's endorsement appears on the cover of Jones' *Mr Vogel*. Also, Sinclair recommends Griffiths in Jones, 'Welshman Disguised as a Londoner', and in his introduction to Stokes, *The Valleys*. His endorsement also appears on the back cover of Griffiths, *Sheepshagger*.

¹⁰⁰ Anonymous, 'Iain Sinclair: the celebrated writer on a collapsing London', *Hum: London Unpeeled* (June 2010), p. 61, <[https://www.gold.ac.uk/media/HUM%20\(Screen\).pdf](https://www.gold.ac.uk/media/HUM%20(Screen).pdf)>

¹⁰¹ Thomas and Aaron, 'Pulling you through changes', p. 300.

doctor'.¹⁰² The coinage 'son of a doctor' is likely a direct transcription from *Lights Out for the Territory*, in which it first appeared in 1997 (and has since been used sporadically). The earliest mention of Sinclair being born in Wales (in his published work) is in *Penguin Modern Poets 10* (published in 1996), which states simply 'Iain Sinclair was born in Cardiff in 1943'.¹⁰³ Sinclair's earlier novels make no mention of his place of birth, instead listing a 'wide variety of [previous] jobs', such as 'lecturing, film-making, park gardening, and brewery and dock work'.¹⁰⁴

Slow Chocolate Autopsy does not display the same level of engagement with Wales as *Landor's Tower*, although it is the first book in which Sinclair uses the character Norton, the central character who, as protagonist of *Landor's Tower*, gives voice to the 'scurrilous caricatures' of the Welsh mentioned earlier. Although Thomas and Aaron suggest that the advertising of Sinclair's Welshness in *Landor's Tower* is emblematic of an emergent post-devolutionary interest of London-based publishers in Welsh writing in English, the paratextual reference to Sinclair's origins in South Wales that appears in *Slow Chocolate Autopsy* clearly problematises this argument.¹⁰⁵ The chronology provided by Thomas and Aaron is both valuable and persuasive. However, while post-devolutionary interest may

¹⁰² Shaffer, ed., *Literary Devolution*, p. xvi.

¹⁰³ *Penguin Modern Poets 10: Douglas Oliver, Denise Riley, Iain Sinclair* (London: Penguin, 1996).

¹⁰⁴ This list is excerpted from the first edition of Sinclair's *Downriver* (London: Paladin, 1991). The 1995 Vintage edition of *Downriver* is more sparing: 'Iain Sinclair has been a rare book dealer, parks gardener, and all-purposes labourer across East London'.

¹⁰⁵ In an anecdote related to Iain Sinclair's bibliographer Jeff Johnson, Nicholas Johnson – editor of Etruscan Books, publishers of Sinclair's *Saddling the Rabbit* and *The Firewall* – recalls that the first printing of *Slow Chocolate Autopsy* was 'released with the second state DJ [dust jacket] because the first state DJ was pulped due to misrepresenting Scotland as Iain's birthplace'. Jeff Johnson, *Cite Scout for the Territory: An interview about the in-progress bibliography of the works of Iain Sinclair with Jeff Johnson* (Coventry: Beat Scene Press, 2014), un-paginated.

explain the logic behind the appearance of 'born in Wales' in *Landor's Tower*, its presence in *Slow Chocolate Autopsy* – a book of no particular relevance to Wales – presents a significant, alternative chronology.

Slow Chocolate Autopsy was published in 1997, the same year in which Sinclair's first full-length non-fiction, *Lights Out for the Territory*, appeared. Sinclair's move into writing non-fiction renders the contemporaneous creation of his avatar (Norton) problematic, especially given the aforementioned borderlessness between each genre evidenced in his work.¹⁰⁶ Thus 1997 is the year in which Sinclair divides his literary persona, using 'Andrew Norton' in fiction and 'Iain Sinclair' in non-fiction. Providing a meta-commentary on his ever-changing blurbs, Sinclair's most recent novel *Dining on Stones* (2004) includes the following mock obituary for Norton: 'Born in Wales, educated in Gloucestershire, his work was largely set in East London'.¹⁰⁷ The date of *Slow Chocolate Autopsy*'s publication locates Sinclair's public Welshness as preceding the devolution referendum rather than solely as an emblem of post-devolutionary confidence from his London-based publisher. The book's subtitle, *Incidents from the Notorious Career of Norton, Prisoner of London*, evokes a sense of entrapment within London, and recalls Sinclair's discomfort at allowing himself to become a 'London brand'. Like many of Sinclair's works, the subtitle does not feature on the cover of the book, though it can be seen to indicate Sinclair's own sense of entrapment, as his next work of fiction is *Landor's Tower*, in which Norton uses his research about Walter Savage Landor as an excuse to leave London: 'Who else would touch this gig? Something had gone

¹⁰⁶ Norton is effectively a caricature; Alan Moore uses the Norton character (with Sinclair's permission) in his *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* comic, with the visual representation unambiguously based on Sinclair himself.

¹⁰⁷ Iain Sinclair, *Dining on Stones* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2004), p. 349.

wrong in the city, in London [...]. From the suburbs, the drift was west [...]. All roads led to Bristol. What was going on?’¹⁰⁸

Although *Llandor's Tower* was published after the 1997 referendum, Sinclair originally started work on it ten years prior in 1987. This was also the year in which his first novel, *White Chappell: Scarlet Tracings* was published. Sinclair says of this moment:

After finishing the first book I went down there [Wales] and got this cottage to live in, to do the research, and I just found myself completely spooked by the atmosphere of this place. It was later revealed that this had been taken for the winter by Terry Waite, and at that moment he was locked up in a basement in Beirut [...] So I retreated and came back to London. [...] With our house half built, I couldn't work on this substantial structure that turned out to be Llandor's [sic] Tower. So I started to do *Downriver*, which was easier because I could do it in twelve separate chunks, and do odd days, so the project was abandoned for years.¹⁰⁹

Allusions to this chronology occur in the first edition of *White Chappell, Scarlet Tracings*, which is said to close ‘the triad begun with *Lud Heat* (1975) and *Suicide Bridge* (1979), [and] it opens, hopefully, a second triad’.¹¹⁰ The second triad, as intended, would be *White Chappell* (1987), *Downriver* (1991), *Radon Daughters* (1994).¹¹¹ The use of the word ‘triad’ in place of the more conventional ‘trilogy’ intertextually alludes to an important group of Welsh medieval manuscripts, *The Welsh Triads/Trioedd Ynys Prydain*, colluding with the

¹⁰⁸ Sinclair, *Llandor's Tower*, pp. 19–20.

¹⁰⁹ Mark Pilkington and Phil Baker, ‘Iain Sinclair: City Brain,’ *Fortean Times* (April 2002), <http://www.forteanimes.com/features/interviews/37/iain_sinclair.html>

¹¹⁰ Iain Sinclair, *White Chappell, Scarlet Tracings* (Uppingham: Goldmark, 1987).

¹¹¹ Iain Sinclair, *Radon Daughters* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1994).

epitextual presence of the *Mabinogion* in *Downriver*.¹¹² However, given that Sinclair intended to write his 'Welsh book' immediately following the publication of *White Chappell* in 1987, the alternate, intended chronology alluded to at the end of *White Chappell* would have been: *White Chappell*, *Landor's Tower*, *Downriver*. The mention of a 'second triad' retains its place in the 1995 Vintage edition of *White Chappell*, both reinforcing and complicating the chronology, given that by that time *Downriver* (1991) and *Radon Daughters* (1994) had both been published, and *Landor's Tower* had not.¹¹³ Whether or not this alternate history of Sinclair's 'second triad' is indeed plausible, what it does show is that the chronology of Sinclair's publications (specifically his novels) would not be regarded as so London-centric had he not 'abandoned' the writing of *Landor's Tower* due to outside circumstances.¹¹⁴ What the former, alternate, chronology suggests is that *Landor's Tower* is a novel that occupies a dual temporality; it is both a pre- and post-devolution text, begun (at least) ten years prior to the referendum and completed four years after it.¹¹⁵

The aim of this chapter so far has been to formally address the matter of Sinclair and Wales.

While any attempt to derive a singular meaning from Sinclair's paratexts would be

¹¹² See Rachel Bromwich, ed. and trans., *Trioedd Ynys Prydein: The Welsh Triads*, 3rd edn (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2006).

¹¹³ Iain Sinclair, *White Chappell, Scarlet Tracings* (London: Vintage, 1995).

¹¹⁴ Another interpretation could be that *Landor's Tower* is the second in a trilogy consisting of *Slow Chocolate Autopsy* (1997) and *Dining on Stones* (2004), given that each text is told through the medium of Sinclair's avatar, 'Norton'.

¹¹⁵ The earliest dated notes for *Landor's Tower* begin with a visit to Hay-on-Wye on 20 July 1987, Folder: 'Research Materials', Harry Ransom Center. There is perhaps an additional layer to *Landor's Tower's* post-devolution commentary; the novel was originally meant to be delivered to Granta in September 1997 (the month of the devolution referendum), and had it done so its devolutionary content would have been impacted significantly (the novel would not have been located in what Sinclair describes as 'political Wales'). Document: 'Granta Books Agreement', Folder: 'Sinclair Contracts', Sub-Folder: 'Lights Out for the Territory et al.', Harry Ransom Center.

potentially reductive, the inconsistency of Sinclair's authorial blurbs, specifically the appearance and disappearance of the 'born in Wales' line, shows that there is merit in the incorporation of such elements into a discussion of Sinclair and Wales. Similarly, the reappearance of the 'triad' line in the Vintage edition of *White Chappell* is problematic, but its retention suggests that it is an intrinsic part of the work, even if the projected 'second triad' never emerged as intended. While there is a good deal of inconsistency in Sinclair's interviews, his reflections on Wales are remarkably consistent; 'giving interviews away like they are going out of fashion' ensures that his epitextual presence proliferates and accumulates various contradictions. The abundance of such material ensures that Sinclair's texts, and the liminal presences within them, are never fully resolved. Additionally, as can be seen in the example of *Muscat's Würm* above (which is only elucidated by the correspondence between Sinclair and Finch), some of these connections may never be discovered. The impossibility of closure in Sinclair's texts is thus an integral component of his strategy. Reflecting on this issue in an article for the *London Review of Books*, Sinclair writes:

Artists shouldn't dress their pitch. They should never give interviews, except as a game. The smart ones learn the tricks, the dodges. They ventriloquise themselves, offer defensive strategies. They develop a brand identity. They franchise small eccentricities. And the solemn quackers, the media scribes, buy it.¹¹⁶

Whether or not the analysis of such paratexts constitutes 'buying it', Sinclair's peritexts, and his 'neo-modernist' poetic invite readers to investigate his epitexts for a sense of closure.

¹¹⁶ Iain Sinclair, 'In Hackney', *London Review of Books*, 23/22, 15 November 2001, p. 22.

The nomination of *Downriver* as Wales' greatest novel is evidence of the potential for the study of Sinclair and Wales (as is *Ghost Milk's* nomination for Wales Book of the Year), but as this chapter hopefully demonstrates, Sinclair's early writing is evidence that these connections, whether covert or otherwise, go much deeper than is often recognised.

'The Mabinogi of Shame'

This chapter has so far considered Sinclair's London work as being recognisably influenced by Welsh mythology. However, there is also a distinct sense that Welsh (and non-London) locations are significant to his London project. In a recent essay, Sinclair alludes to the importance of locations outside of London to his work, writing that 'West was a necessary otherness, never, quite, an aspiration'.¹¹⁷ In a recent essay entitled 'Un/Settling', Sinclair writes:

Living in London [in] a terraced house in Hackney, dreams of floating away into the hills of childhood faded; the superimpositions of Welsh memory-scapes imposed on downriver places. The touch of Hackney gravity was countered, or flattered perhaps, by expeditions, outings, tramps to the west.¹¹⁸

The Westerly movement of Sinclair's writing is exemplified in the title of the first of *Landor's Tower's* three sections 'Creeping Westward'. While the predominant location of most of Sinclair's work is clearly London, Wales maintains a peripheral, but important presence. The

¹¹⁷ Iain Sinclair, 'Un/Settling', in *Westering* (London: Test Centre, 2015), p. 65.

¹¹⁸ Iain Sinclair, 'Un/Settling', p. 65.

question this section will attempt to answer is to what extent Sinclair's Welsh work reverses this movement; that is, how do Sinclair's Welsh books (which are, admittedly, small in number) reflect his London influences and geographies? Sinclair's border crossings throughout his career are somewhat paradoxical; examples quoted from in the previous section suggest that he has felt like an exile in London, but in *Landor's Tower* the narrative is clearly based around the experience of feeling like an exile from London in Wales. While *Landor's Tower* ostensibly features a narrator who regrets his decision to escape from London, eventually becoming trapped in the 'spiritual gulag' of Capel-y-ffin, there is evidence of a discernible homesickness, even *hiraeth*, in the Welsh references in Sinclair's London writing (although it is unlikely that he would use a term with such romantic connotations publicly).¹¹⁹

Following the publication of *Landor's Tower*, Sinclair's profile in Wales, and his recognition as a Welsh author, has steadily increased. In the year of his nomination for Wales Book of the Year in 2012, he was also made a Fellow of Yr Academi Gymreig, further emphasising the incorporation of his work into the field of Welsh writing.¹²⁰ While Sinclair's only full-length Wales-located work was until recently *Landor's Tower* in 2001, the publication of *Black Apples of Gower* in 2015 merits a reappraisal of Sinclair's literary treatment of Wales (when it is not filtered through a discussion of London territories). Both books were published in the aftermath of devolution (by the London-based publisher Granta, and a smaller English press, Little Toller, respectively), and this period of political change in Wales

¹¹⁹ *Landor's Tower*, p. 180.

¹²⁰ See *Literature Wales' Annual Report, 2011-12*:
<https://web.archive.org/web/20140524015925/http://www.literaturewales.org/creo_files/upload/articles%5Buser_id%5D/literature_wales_annual_report_2011_-_12.pdf>

provides the context, if not an explanation, for a more detailed reading of Sinclair's literary treatment of Welsh culture (both political and artistic), and geographies. Many of the examples discussed in the opening section of this chapter demonstrate a kind of defensiveness in Sinclair about his identification as a Welsh writer (or at least, an unwavering consistency in his reluctance to being considered as an English writer).¹²¹ In a recent interview Sinclair suggested that he is 'quite happy to be in London as a form of benevolent exile'.¹²² On the one hand we might view Sinclair in London as a self-styled ambassador for Wales, and an inheritor of the 'London-Welsh' hyphenisation of writers like Arthur Machen and W.H. Davies.¹²³ However, one could also interpret this as Sinclair feeling that Wales is somehow better off in his absence. The clarity of Sinclair in the role of interviewee contrasts with the opaque language of his surrogate Norton (the narrator of *Londor's Tower*), but Sinclair's interviewee persona often exploits the line between biography and fiction (as a result of his experience as both publisher and writer, he is keenly aware of his intended audience). As a consequence of its blurring of the boundary between fictional and autobiographical modes (and the proliferation of contradictory statements and personae in his interviews), Sinclair's fiction is especially resistant to being placed in a singular literary geographical space (which may appear somewhat paradoxical given the close association of his non-fiction with very specific geographies).

¹²¹ Sinclair's Wikipedia entry identified him as a British writer from its creation in 2004, but since January 2016 has identified him as a 'Welsh' writer. See

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iain_Sinclair>

¹²² Iain Sinclair, 'Political and Bardic Traditions in Wales', BBC Radio Three, 23 Jun 2015

<<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b05zhbdg>>

¹²³ A discussion of labels and identity in English-language Welsh writers seems incomplete without R.S. Thomas's resonant, yet problematic, assertion about 'Anglo-Welsh' writers: 'hyphenisation is betrayal', R.S. Thomas, *Cymru or Wales?* (Llandysul: Gomer, 1992), p. 30. Tomos Owen's 'London-Welsh Writing 1890-1915: Ernest Rhys, Arthur Machen, W. H. Davies, and Caradoc Evans' (unpublished PhD thesis, Cardiff University, 2011), explores the connections between Machen and Davies (as well as Rhys and Evans).

Landor's Tower covers a large geographical area that avoids urban centres. Its geographical centre is the Ewyras valley, and while the narrative occasionally strays into England and other areas of South Wales, it never strays into the north.¹²⁴ The most significant location in the novel, the borderland in which Llanthony Abbey is located, is remote rather than marginalised. In the original outline of *Landor's Tower*, there are several indications of a different direction that the final version may have taken. The subtitle of the original draft – which in the published version is 'Or, the Imaginary Conversations' (an allusion to Walter Savage Landor's works of the same name) – is 'Or, the Mabinogi of Shame'.¹²⁵ The eventual omission of the original subtitle has a distinct echo of the change in title of Sinclair's seminal *Lud Heat*, which was originally titled *LLUDDHeat*, retaining the Welsh digraphs 'll' and 'dd'. This significantly alters its pronunciation (making it phonetically closer to the original Welsh name), and placing it in contrast to the Anglicised spelling that has become more associated with London through 'Ludgate'.¹²⁶ There are two important points to note here: first, the original title of the novel incorporated, or at least foregrounded, the importance of Welsh mythology to the novel (thus making the eventual omission of the *Mabinogion* from the novel problematic). Second, that the novel is foregrounded as one of 'shame' (presumably that of the narrator, and returning exile, Norton/Sinclair). In the original outline there are

¹²⁴ Sinclair's Welsh work is predominantly focused in the south, with some minor exceptions. The Albion Island Vortex exhibition featured poetry and photography on the subject of Cader Idris, and Sinclair mentions returning from a journey to Blaenau Ffestiniog to interview John Cowper Powys's former mistress Phyllis Plater 'like a worn out private detective' (*Our Unknown Everywhere*, p. 17). In 'Un/Settling', Sinclair writes of his 'adventures sniffing after traces of John Cowper Powys around the slate quarries of Blaenau Ffestiniog. And climbs up Cader Idris', ('Un/Settling', p. 65).

¹²⁵ Document: 'Outline', Folder: 'Landor's Tower: Notebook, Outline, Notes', Harry Ransom Center, p. 1. See Walter Savage Landor, *Imaginary Conversations* (London: Scott, 1886).

¹²⁶ Document: 'LLudHeat', Folder: 'LLuddheat', Harry Ransom Center.

several references and allusions to expanded sections on the *Mabinogion*, but only a few examples are included in the novel (and nothing as significant as the references in *Downriver*).¹²⁷ The following passage is one such example and features Norton discussing Robert Graves (whose *White Goddess* is referred to on multiple occasions), and David Jones's adaptation of the Twrch Trwyth myth in his poem 'The Hunt':

Robert Graves had walked Offa's Dyke, weeping and grinding his teeth and talking to his comrades, the ones with wounds instead of faces. He shuddered from the impact of the guns. Tanks churned the slanting fields into mud. This was Annwn, the hidden kingdom of the dead. The tank was Twrch Trwyth, a boar whose ferocity had no limits, one of the hunted who becomes a hunter; leading his pursuers through forests and swamps, over mountains, down rushing streams.¹²⁸

The *Mabinogion* is referred to indirectly through the interpretations of Graves and Jones (and lends it a distinctly militaristic feel). It contrasts significantly with the more original and nuanced interpretation of the *Mabinogion* in *Downriver*, and once again points towards a representation of Wales that is inhibited by the representations of previous writers.

The *Mabinogion* becomes significant in its relative absence from *Landor's Tower*, which is perhaps surprising given that this is Sinclair's first attempt at operating explicitly within the territory of the original myths. Instead of engaging with the myth directly, *Landor's Tower* relates it through implication (both through Graves's *White Goddess* and Jones's poem).

¹²⁷ Document: 'Outline', Folder: 'Landor's Tower: Notebook, Outline, Notes', p. 24, p. 42.

¹²⁸ *Landor's Tower*, p. 226.

Rather than directly engaging with the mythology of the *Mabinogion*, *Landor's Tower* is more concerned with Sinclair's self-conscious self-mythologising; or to what he refers as the construction (or discovery) of his Welsh mythos. The myths to which *Landor's Tower* refers are more contemporary, such as the disappearance of Richey Edwards (the Manic Street Preachers guitarist), and the Marconi Murders conspiracy theory.¹²⁹ Consequently, contemporary myths and rumours compete with and overwhelm the myths from the *Mabinogion*, creating a narrative in which contemporary and historical myths collide (and occasionally merge) with one another.

Sinclair's London psychogeographies might be considered as a form of textual resistance to the grand projects of London (which are frequently predicated on physical resistance in the form of trespassing), and his suspicion of such projects is evident in his polemical writing in opposition to the building of both the London Olympic Village and the Millennium Dome.¹³⁰ His engagement with politics is engendered by geographical proximity; his work rarely provides a critique of distant places, instead focusing on the local (however palimpsestic and contradictory that space might be). Sinclair's engagement with mythology – specifically the mythology of Wales in London – is less restricted by any particularist geography. *Downriver's* use of Welsh and Wales-located mythology in London appears alien given its geographical distance from Wales. The lack of discussion of Sinclair's significant (and overt) use of Welsh mythology in *Downriver* may be explained by a relative lack of knowledge of

¹²⁹ See "'Hey!' Skip said, 'that's Richey. Richey Edwards, the Missing Manic'" (*Landor's Tower*, p. 155). For an account of the Marconi conspiracy, see Tony Collins, *Open Verdict* (London: Sphere, 1990).

¹³⁰ See: Iain Sinclair, 'The Olympics Scam', *London Review of Books*, 30.12 (2008), pp. 17-23; Iain Sinclair, *Sorry Meniscus: Excursions to the Millennium Dome* (London: Profile Books, 1999).

Welsh mythological texts such as the *Mabinogion* beyond the borders of Wales.¹³¹ So, while descriptions of Welsh topography veer between being peripheral and non-existent in Sinclair's London-based texts, its mythology is central to his London fictions such as *Lud Heat* and *Downriver*.¹³² Sinclair's observation that 'the Welsh didn't like [*Landor's Tower*], and everybody else thought I should stick to writing about London' demonstrates how acutely aware he is of the reception of his work for (at least) these two audiences.¹³³

In an interview following the publication of *Black Apples* (which will be discussed shortly), Sinclair suggested his inability to speak Welsh as a potential reason for his alienation from Wales: 'There's a sense of guilt of not belonging deeper to this landscape and in not having the language that was the language of my mother and my grandparents and the sounds that I grew up with'.¹³⁴ There is perhaps a sense that Sinclair's lack of knowledge of the Welsh language manifests itself in the themes of guilt and dissociation that plague *Landor's Tower's* narrator, Norton.¹³⁵ The connection between language and landscape creates the perception of a further barrier to his representation of Wales (or the Welsh landscape). This 'guilt' is evident in both *Landor's Tower* and *Black Apples*, and in a recent interview Sinclair suggested, as opposed to feeling like a Welsh exile in London, 'the exile is in being here [in Wales]'.¹³⁶ Fflur Dafydd's contention that devolution has 'heralded a new confidence in

¹³¹ An attitude corroborated in Niall Griffiths suggestion that the *Mabinogion* is 'barely read beyond the pales of academia now' in *The Dreams of Max and Ronnie* (Bridgend: Seren, 2010), p. 156.

¹³² While *Lud Heat* is a prose poem, it has sufficient elements of narrative and fiction that warrant discussing it within Sinclair's fictional oeuvre.

¹³³ *Our Unknown Everywhere*, p. 25.

¹³⁴ Iain Sinclair, 'Political and Bardic Traditions in Wales'.

¹³⁵ Although it would be wise to retain a sense of perspective about Sinclair's often contradictory pronouncements about his sense of national identity.

¹³⁶ Iain Sinclair, 'Political and Bardic Traditions in Wales'.

bilingualism' certainly provides an interesting context for Sinclair's post-devolution writing in Wales, given that his Welsh work appears anything but confident in its approach to the Welsh language.¹³⁷ In fact, the bilingualism espoused by Ffowc Elis and Morris has no prominent place in Sinclair's Wales; the Wales of *Landor* is a distinctly Anglophone location (although his focus on the industrial south and border towns undoubtedly contributes to this vision). Other than proper nouns, the Welsh language does not feature in Sinclair's Welsh fictions, although this is largely a result of his cast of characters also coming from London. Language itself is certainly a major concern for Norton in *Landor's Tower*, who writes: 'If I didn't have the language to describe the place in which I found myself, the technical terms for all the processes of nature and weather, how could I be said to be here at all?'.¹³⁸ While there are clear differences between technical terminology and Welsh, for Sinclair, the act of being in a place (or 'belonging' to a landscape) is contingent on possessing the language to describe that place. Sinclair's disconnection from the Welsh landscape is a result of his lack of the appropriate vocabulary; *Landor's Tower* becomes an exercise in representing Welsh spaces while also acknowledging the twofold linguistic deficit of both technical descriptors and Cymraeg. However, the difficulty in rendering space in language was a preoccupation of Sinclair's long before *Landor's Tower*. The *Albion Island Vortex* exhibition (1973) featured the following reflection:

Terrain does not require the neurosis of language. We tie ourselves in such complicated knots trying to describe a thing that is all description. We confirm our

¹³⁷ Fflur Dafydd, 'Expert View: Time to Leave the Hermitage', *The Guardian*, 10 October 2011 <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/oct/10/devolution-welsh-ready-to-fly>>

¹³⁸ *Landor's Tower*, p. 167.

own nuisance by employing, to greater or lesser effect, a redundant vocabulary of technical terms, overcooked epiphanies, showboating similes.¹³⁹

However, there is another significant component to Sinclair's linguistic difficulty with Wales, one that is more rooted in the contrast between urban and rural spaces. Sinclair frequently attends to the marginal places of London, resisting the notion of a geographical centre. As Brian Jarvis has argued, '[m]arginalised spaces are always implied and central to any map's significance, they are a clue to the ideology through which space is seen and felt'.¹⁴⁰ Sinclair's attention to the marginal spaces of London renders them both literally and figuratively un-marginalised in his work; the peripheral space becomes both central to and within the textual space. Sinclair's London project thus constitutes a reconnoitring of the margins that both reveals and resists the dominant contemporary ideological underpinnings of London (walking the M25 in *London Orbital* being one such example). For example, Sinclair's attention to graffiti resists categorising it only as a manifestation of a counter-culturalist impulse, but as 'the marginalia of high corporate tribalism', and suggests that it 'parod[ies] the most visible aspect of high capitalist black magic'.¹⁴¹ Sinclair's London work thus attempts to re-centre a discussion around the less frequently remarked-upon places and aspects of London as a way to critique the ideology of the city itself. Transferring this technique to predominantly rural (or at least decidedly less urban) areas of Wales in *Landor's Tower* is problematic, because more sparsely populated areas disable Sinclair's usual walking of the margins. The sheer distance covered in the South Wales landscape of

¹³⁹ An excerpt from the 'Albion Island Vortex' exhibition at Whitechapel Gallery, reproduced in *Black Apples*, p. 38.

¹⁴⁰ Brian Jarvis, *Postmodern Cartographies: The Geographical Imagination in Contemporary American Culture* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1998), p.8.

¹⁴¹ Iain Sinclair, *Lights Out for the Territory*, p. 1.

Landor's Tower precludes the kind of psychogeographical wandering that had become a feature of Sinclair's writing (fiction, non-fiction, and poetry). As the character Silverfish says of the journey to Norton, '[y]ou can't do a road movie on foot'.¹⁴²

Using the concept of 'non-places' formulated by Marc Augé,¹⁴³ Brian Baker suggests that

Sinclair's move from centre to margins, from Whitechapel to M25 [in *London Orbital*], represents a change in symbolic topography: from the city to the suburb; from the specificities of the East End (Hawksmoor's churches, mythical alignments and triangulations of key buildings, urban myths and narratives) to the dehistoricised and anonymous corporate architecture of London's suburban ring; from the utopianism of modernity to the non-places of postmodernity.¹⁴⁴

Sinclair's London project responds indirectly to Jarvis's argument, and, as Baker suggests, 'Sinclair's project is to turn "non-place" back into "place"'.¹⁴⁵ While Baker is correct to identify Sinclair's shift into the margins and London's non-places, *Landor's Tower* (and *Black Apples of Gower*) do not correspond to this movement.¹⁴⁶ Writing about a landscape as historically and textually significant as Llanthony Abbey and the Ewyas Valley thus presents a problem for Sinclair's 'project' as it is defined by Baker. In fact, the issues encountered in *Landor's Tower* more closely correspond to those in *White Chappell*, which negotiates the

¹⁴² *Landor's Tower*, p. 257.

¹⁴³ Marc Augé, *Non-places*.

¹⁴⁴ Baker, p. 150.

¹⁴⁵ Baker, p. 153.

¹⁴⁶ It is worth noting that both *Radon Daughters* and *Dining on Stones* expand beyond the peripheries of London, and into Oxford and Sussex respectively.

ever-proliferating palimpsest of Whitechapel and the Jack the Ripper mythology.¹⁴⁷ As such, where Sinclair's (non-fiction) London psychogeographies attempt to 'turn "non-place" back into "place"', *Landor's Tower* attempts to negotiate a series of historically and personally significant Welsh locations and their literary representations.¹⁴⁸

While Welsh 'non-places' do receive some attention in *Landor's Tower* (in the de-industrialised South Wales valleys discussed below), the use of such distinctly historically significant territory impacts upon Sinclair's representation of Welsh topography. It is also worth questioning that if Wales is a marginal, peripheral, but nonetheless crucial space within Sinclair's London project, how do Sinclair's Welsh texts explore the relationship between central and peripheral space? Sinclair's rendering of Welsh mythology, in *Downriver* for example, is predicated on an alienation and distancing of the myth (of Blodeuwedd or Lleu) from its origin (Wales). Thus, when *Landor's Tower* engages with recognisably Welsh territory (a territory that is not only personally significant, but also of increasing political significance following devolution), there is a sense that the myth cannot be re-located in the Welsh landscape without being affected and changed. Brian Baker suggests that

the [Welsh] borderlands are London's other, yet London's double; the narrator finds the same occult forces breaking through the surface of the countryside as were

¹⁴⁷ Sinclair in turn contributes to this textual space, and his work is cited in Alan Moore's Jack the Ripper graphic novel *From Hell* (London: Knockabout Comics, 2006).

¹⁴⁸ Jon Anderson suggests that a section of *Landor's Tower's*, in Aust Service Station, is an 'entry point into [Sinclair's] multiverse, offering his characters the opportunity to re-fresh themselves before entering or exiting the borderland world', Jon Anderson, *Page and Place: Ongoing Compositions of Plot* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2014), p. 307.

found in Sinclair's 'lines of force' in *Lud Heat* and elsewhere. Machen's grafting of one significant space onto another is repeated by *Landor's Tower* itself.¹⁴⁹

Baker rightly points out that Sinclair layers his representations of space, the new geographical centre (and what that centre represents) ensures that Sinclair's 'Welsh' texts don't imitate or repeat his London texts, even though they bear significant stylistic similarities and a shared set of recurring characters.¹⁵⁰ The 'otherness' of Wales as identified by Baker, specifically the borderland territory of *Landor's Tower*, also echoes Sinclair's own description of Wales as a 'necessary otherness'. However, while Baker's 'grafting' metaphor is useful, it might subjugate Sinclair's Welsh texts to his London project (a position that the opening section of this chapter has sought to refute). What I wish to suggest here is that one of the primary functions of *Landor's Tower* in Sinclair's oeuvre – and one that is explicitly acknowledged in the novel itself – is its failure to render Wales and apply Sinclair's London project's methodology. It is, to reconfigure Baker, Sinclair's inability to graft 'one significant space onto another' that is at the forefront of the *Landor's Tower*.

Landor's Tower frequently interpolates imagery of London with images of Wales, so a vocabulary developed in response to London's environs (one in which Sinclair is clearly well-versed) is used to describe Welsh places (or 'grafted' onto Welsh space to use Baker's term), to varying degrees of success. In *Landor's Tower*, Sinclair cites the photographer Robert Frank as a key inspiration, and he elaborates on this in *The Verbals*:

¹⁴⁹ Baker, p. 166.

¹⁵⁰ And *Landor's Tower* itself is part of a trilogy, or quadrilogy, of Sinclair's fictions.

This book [Robert Frank's *London/Wales*] was one of my absolute cornerstones, East-London and the City intercut with a photo-essay on a Welsh mining town [...] At the head of a valley where I grew up, the place where my father had a surgery; the landscape through which I had walked, time without number.¹⁵¹

The discovery of Frank's photography provides a seminal breakthrough in Sinclair's early attempts to imagine a career as a professional writer, and echoes his early correspondence with Vernon Watkins. Through Frank, Sinclair is able to imagine a potential correspondence between his London project and the landscape in which he was raised.¹⁵² It is something echoed recently in an interview in which he said 'Wales is the dream that underwrote everything I did'.¹⁵³ Frank's photographic correspondence between London and Wales is of particular significance because it provides Sinclair with a language, and a vocabulary, through which he can begin to articulate the landscape of his childhood and express his Welsh/London identity.

It is a process that bears resemblance to Machen's writing, and Sinclair begins his essay on Machen with a quotation from Machen's *London Adventure* that is repeatedly echoed in Sinclair's work: 'There are certain parts of Clapton from which it is possible, on sunny days, to see the pleasant hills of Beulah, though topographical experts might possibly assure you

¹⁵¹ *The Valleys*, p. 9.

¹⁵² Frank's influence is reflected in *Black Apples of Gower's* documentary-style photography, as well as the photographs that are crucial to early poetry collections such as *Muscat's Würm*.

¹⁵³ Iain Sinclair, 'Political and Bardic Traditions in Wales'.

that it was only Epping Forest.¹⁵⁴ Sinclair's descriptions of London geography in *Landor's Tower* often explicitly negotiate the border between both real and imagined London/Welsh spaces: 'The green lung of Victoria Park stood in for the Welsh Marches'.¹⁵⁵ Eventually, Sinclair concludes that he doesn't have the language to describe Wales, and that his attempt at a Welsh novel had been a failure: 'I was coming apart. I thought I was tracing a palimpsest of David Jones, the *Mabinogion* and classic Welsh mythology, and found myself, up to the oxters, in Mickey Spillane'.¹⁵⁶ The original intention of the novel (at least the 'Norton novel' that comprises the first two sections of *Landor's Tower*), which was to trace a landscape inhabited at various times by Walter Savage Landor, Eric Gill, Jones, and Machen amongst others, is quickly overcome by the narrative quirks of a crime novel (which distinctly echoes *White Chappell*). Ironically, the vocabulary required to describe the Ewyas valley (for which Norton is striving) is one that Landor himself claims to possess: 'The Welsh don't deserve this valley. They don't have the language to describe it'.¹⁵⁷ *Landor's Tower* becomes a novel of competing literary forces (Jones, Machen, Landor, the *Mabinogion*), and Sinclair's voice recedes into the background. It is a problem of which Sinclair was acutely aware several years earlier in *Suicide Bridge*, when he writes: 'The Wessex of Powys is not the Wessex of Hardy, and it does not operate within the same temporal ocean [...] Is it even the same ground?'.¹⁵⁸ *Landor's Tower* appears to partially answer this query, remarking on

¹⁵⁴ *Our Unknown Everywhere*, p. 7. The quotation is from Machen's *London Adventure* (London: Martin Secker, 1924), p.100. 'Beulah' is a particularly loaded term, which conjures several plausible real and imagined spaces, such as William Blake's *Jerusalem*, an area of London near Upper Norwood, and Beulah, Powys.

¹⁵⁵ *Landor's Tower*, p. 27. In *Our Unknown Everywhere*, the borderland is again invoked and refracted through Machen: 'Hackney Marshes was my equivalent for Machen's simmering memory-landscapes of the Welsh border.' *Our Unknown Everywhere*, p. 15.

¹⁵⁶ *Landor's Tower*, p. 287. Mickey Spillane was an American crime novelist (1918-2006).

¹⁵⁷ *Landor's Tower*, p. 144.

¹⁵⁸ Iain Sinclair, 'John Cowper Powys: A Victim of the West', *Suicide Bridge*, p. 175.

the consequence of rendering a proliferation of literary and artistic representations of the Ewyas valley: 'In the floating island of the little churchyard at Capel-y-ffin confusion was manufactured.'¹⁵⁹

South Wales Valleys and Industrial Decline

Perhaps uniquely in Sinclair's fiction – which prior to *Landor's Tower* rarely makes use of romantic tropes – Norton's return to Wales (the 'return of the exile') directly addresses the relationship between the author and his 'home' territory, rather than the consciously adopted territory of East London.¹⁶⁰ As is if to pre-empt accusations of a softening in his usual approach to London in Wales, Sinclair includes politically charged passages on the decline of industry in the South Wales valleys:

I was undone by my natural tendency to keep a low profile, to fit in. It goes back, I suppose, to being sent away to school in England with an accent somewhere to the West of Max Boyce; an exile's romanticism about the weary, corrupt and despoiled colonial outpost from which I'd come. South Wales thrived under occupation. First the Romans, then the English, now the Japanese. A welcome in the valleys. We were quislings bred in the bone. Now those valleys looked like the far side of the moon, industrial debris rusting in apocalyptic mounds.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ *Landor's Tower*, p. 69.

¹⁶⁰ Although Norton himself is described in the novel's subtitle as a 'prisoner of London', rather than someone comfortable in its environs.

¹⁶¹ *Landor's Tower*, p.233.

It appears that Sinclair is conscious of areas of decline in South Wales, but his criticism is firmly directed towards various occupying forces in Wales, as well as the 'colonial' power exerted on Wales by 'the English'. He alludes to his disguising of his Welshness (once again echoing his description of himself as a 'Welshman disguised as a Londoner') as a response to moving across the border, but also suggests that this is a result of several waves of colonial and industrial 'occupation[s]'. This is the same area that Sinclair described (in his introduction to *The Valleys*) as:

[a] landscape, newly forested, dressed with development money, compulsory cycle tracks, heritage history (the final colonisation), is trenched and wormed by shafts, tunnels, mine-workings. The bitterness of that story, the rape, the exploitation, the dust and ruin, the closure, will take generations to heal. The sights and sounds of the mining valleys in which I grew up go deeper than the particulars of East London, on which I have spent so many words.¹⁶²

Sinclair returns to the theme of colonisation (as enacted by the tourist industry), and exploitation of both the land and the miners who worked there. The enduring significance of the landscape of the mines, now obscured by newly planted trees, is compared to East London in seemingly unflattering terms. The non-places of Sinclair's adopted home territory are contrasted with the depth, both physical and metaphorical, of Sinclair's homeland. Sinclair's writing itself is averred as a wasted exchange of creative capital, there is a clear sense of regret in the *spending* of words (again the language returns to an 'economic' mode) on the non-places of London instead of 'sights and sounds' of where he 'grew up'.

¹⁶² *The Valleys*, p. 5.

Nonetheless, in *Landor's Tower*, Sinclair's sense of personal loss at the de-industrialisation of the valleys is cloaked in some excoriating language:

They valleys had died; Swansea Valley, Vale of Neath, Rhondda, Cynon, Taff. The ones without Euro grants were worse [...] No work, no industry [...] It was like the postbellum South, the Confederate states: a defeated people living off the bones of the land; angry, frustrated. Prey to the worst compensatory fantasies. Projections of a mythical past. Easy meat for carpetbaggers, the cynical frontmen of a central government interested only in bribing them with baubles, token gestures that ridiculed ancient freedoms [...] Racism, homophobia and greed replaced hypocrisy, envy and benign corruption as the defining elements of Welsh culture.¹⁶³

The South Wales valleys are portrayed as a dystopia, and Sinclair does not attempt to romanticise an area of Wales so perceptibly affected by late-twentieth century de-industrialisation. *Landor's Tower* appears tentative regarding the 'projections of a mythical past', and rejects romanticised versions and the mythology that would at first appear crucial to the text. This further reinforces the suggestion that Sinclair's solitary attempt at Welsh fiction fails because it is too close to the mythological ground that is treated at a distance in *Lud Heat* and *Downriver*. The government that is the target of Sinclair's criticism is clearly not the devolved Assembly (which was still only a year old at the time of writing), but the UK government. While the criticism of *Landor's Tower* that pervaded in Wales centred on the novel's tendency toward a derogatory representation of Wales and its population, it

¹⁶³ *Landor's Tower*, p.333.

appears that Sinclair is broadly sympathetic to the arguments that resulted in devolution, although there is a distinct echo of the 'tokenist assembly' in the phrase 'token gestures'. The criticism is predominantly centred upon a Westminster government that ridicules 'ancient freedoms', and while the phraseology is clearly provocative, it is the 'central government' that is identified as the oppressive colonial force.

Autobiography and the Archive

In a letter to his publisher (Granta), Sinclair clarifies his position on the complexity of the narrative of *Landor's Tower*, and suggests it is a result of combining autobiography with fiction (something that was already a hallmark of Sinclair's writing):

I do know that this is the most complex and intricate narrative that I've ever done [...] What the book does – and I'm well aware of the difficulties here – is to move between an apparent fiction (a masking of documentary and historical material), or several different fictions (criminous, paranoid, mythic, socio-political), and areas of treated autobiography (seemingly straightforward but equally suspect). I was worried throughout about the balance: was the knockabout, lowlife comedy overwhelming the 'visionary' seizures? Could the inserts of autobiographical material hold up, without appearing to be a form of special pleading, an attack on the readers' sympathies? [...] There won't be any major rewrites or acts of surgery, just a general purge and improvement of language.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁴ Document: 'Letter to Neil (surname not noted), Granta Books', Folder: 'Landor's Tower: Notebook, Outline, Notes', 05/05/2000.

It is unclear which particular reader Sinclair is envisaging here; he has already alluded to a distinction in the readership of *Landor's Tower's* between 'the Welsh' (who 'didn't like it), and 'everyone else' (who thought he should 'stick to writing about London').¹⁶⁵ The autobiographical material in *Landor's Tower* includes snippets of conversations and clearly exaggerated or fictionalised encounters. There are moments where such material is distinctly more personal and emotionally resonant; for example, Sinclair listening to the news of his father's death (in Wales), is received (and 'treated') through the character of Norton. While the combination of autobiographical material with fiction is something that Sinclair had implemented in his previous novels, there is a sense that the personal nature of *Landor's Tower* renders certain sections problematic, even knowingly deploying potentially offensive caricatures and national stereotypes (to which the reaction to the novel in Welsh publications attests). Once again Sinclair's Welsh ancestry (which he once intended to film in 'Doctor') is marginalised.

Sinclair's attempt to render the landscape of the Ewias valley was clearly ambitious, and the sprawling rural landscape is in stark contrast to Sinclair's London writing. When submitting *Landor's Tower* to his publisher (Granta), Sinclair alludes to the way in which the novel was structured. Sinclair writes:

¹⁶⁵ In an interview to promote *Landor's Tower's* North American release, Sinclair even suggested that he 'can't even imagine an audience beyond 40 people in London', 'Dealing with Disappearing Characters, interview with Kenneth Baker, *SFGate*, 30 September 2001 <<http://www.sfgate.com/books/article/Dealing-with-disappearing-characters-2872996.php>>

In truth, I can't see any way to edit without damaging a fairly complex structure (pairings, twins, trios & solitary figures all calculated to move in particular trajectories). It doesn't fit together until you reach the last sentence (I hope).¹⁶⁶

The complex composition of *Landor's Tower* and its tactical placement of individual characters and myths, suggest an attempt by Sinclair to represent a landscape that was resistant to his usual methodology. Also, the emphasis on the novel as a complete, *indivisible* work, is crucial for two reasons. First, it emphasises the importance of the third and final section in which 'Sinclair' acknowledges the failure of the initial Norton section of the novel. Second, that Sinclair himself is acknowledging the novel as a spatial event in which the reader is recognised as a crucial part of its geographical work. This argument, and its interpretation of Sinclair's statement, is largely built upon the work of Sheila Hones. In analysing Colum McCann's claim that his novel *Let the Great World Spin* 'is completed only when it is finished by a reader', Hones suggests that:

[...] reader reception is as crucial an element to the event of the text as inspiration and promotion. The process of the text event has to be understood, in other words, in terms of a dynamic interaction, a process of engagement across various kinds of distance through which fiction becomes regenerated and renegotiated in the process of being collaboratively written, published, distributed, read, and discussed.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶ Letter in Folder: 'Landor's Tower: Typescript Draft', 30/08/2000.

¹⁶⁷ Sheila Hones, *Literary Geographies: Narrative Space in Let the Great World Spin*, p. 146.

As I have argued, the promotion and publication of *Landor's Tower* are crucial. Not only does Sinclair use promotional material (such as interviews) to 'talk up' his Welsh heritage, his publisher (Granta) also uses the 'born in Wales' biography to widen Sinclair's appeal within Wales.

The final section of *Landor's Tower* makes the text whole precisely by admitting the failure of the novel to process (even exorcise) Sinclair's Welsh identity. *Landor's Tower* itself refers to the original notebooks, preserved in Sinclair's papers in the Harry Ransom Center (Texas). The final section, 'Resurrection and Immortality', includes the following passage:¹⁶⁸

The Norton novel meant nothing; a folly of the worst kind, forged narratives, faked climaxes, bent history. A disservice to all concerned. This is not what I felt about Wales. This is not what I had to say.

You can make as many charts as you like, plot graphs with different-coloured inks, predict movements, the arguments of ungrateful characters. You can spend years ploughing through biographies, reminiscences by tourists in search of the pastoral; libraries of geology, church histories, mythology. You can visit every site a dozen times, live on the road. It makes no difference. The first sentence on the page and the game's up, the story goes its own way. A fly that refuses to buzz.¹⁶⁹

There are several notable reflections here, but primarily I wish to focus on the metacritical commentary: sections in the notebooks for *Landor's Tower* are meticulously colour-coded

¹⁶⁸ The title 'Resurrection and Immortality' is taken from a Henry Vaughan poem of the same name.

¹⁶⁹ *Landor's Tower*, p. 307

and charted, unlike Sinclair's drafts for previous novels. 'Resurrection and Immortality' is in fact a commentary on the failure of the 'Norton novel' that precedes it.¹⁷⁰ *Landor's Tower* does not suppress its failings, but rather emphasises them. Sinclair acknowledges his failure to write the 'Norton novel', but behind this is the failure to write the 'Mabinogi of Shame'. In the first instance, it is a failure to represent a complex landscape whose previous representations challenge Sinclair's own depiction. In the second, it is either a conscious or subconscious occlusion of the *Mabinogion*, a fundamental component of Sinclair's Welsh identity (and one that features throughout his London writing). This disavowal of the 'Norton' text is crucial to the way that *Landor's Tower* reflects upon Sinclair's Welsh identity. The detailed preparation and research (the research notes include a vast array of seemingly unconnected materials such as brochures and documented research into ketamine) are undermined by Sinclair's inability to construct them in a single narrative that can contain them. Sinclair has referred to the failure to which I have alluded above ('This is not what I had to say') on several occasions, most recently in an interview to promote *Black Apples*. Sinclair says: 'I've never been able to write about Wales [...] I felt somehow inhibited by it, partly by not speaking Welsh, and partly by being too close to it, and then of late not spending time in that territory.'¹⁷¹ The third section of *Landor's Tower*, in which Sinclair ostensibly assumes the role of narrator from Norton, provides a commentary on the process of writing of a place without the possessing a language required to provide a faithful representation, although this is far from a simple assertion about not speaking Welsh. While Sinclair has indicated a sense of guilt at not possessing the Welsh language of his ancestors

¹⁷⁰ One review of the novel suggested that 'There is no discernible plot or structure (for a man obsessed with occult symmetries, Sinclair writes surprisingly shapeless books)', Thomas Wright, 'Hungover already', *Daily Telegraph*, 21 April 2001.

¹⁷¹ "'The Book I Didn't Know I Was Going to Write": Iain Sinclair on the Black Apples of Gower' (Video Interview, 2015), <<https://vimeo.com/132307269>>

(hence the 'shame' of the original subtitle), there is also a sense that his narrative fails to live up to that of the landscape itself. *Landor's Tower* is a paradox of failure, in that the novel is intended as a failed attempt at a novel, but its intention was not recognised. The novel effectively becomes the thing that is the object of its pastiche.

The Gower of Thomas is not the Gower of Watkins

While *Landor's Tower* is a semi-autobiographical portrayal of Sinclair's return to Wales (one that is structured around a parodic failed attempt at a 'return of the exile' narrative), *Black Apples of Gower* is perhaps as close as Sinclair's work has come to un-'treated' autobiography, and deals with a territory that is much closer to the one in which Sinclair spent his childhood (South Wales instead of the borderland around Hay). Where *Landor's Tower* provides just a brief glimpse of Sinclair's reaction to devolution and the emergence of 'political Wales', *Black Apples* provides a more sustained engagement with contemporary Wales. While it doesn't address devolution directly, the landscape to which Sinclair returns is one that has been affected (even reimagined) since devolution. It also shares some significant points of confluence with the 'treated' autobiographical sections of *Landor's Tower*, as well as the often conflicting accounts Sinclair provides when being interviewed (to the extent that some of the same anecdotes are repeated). However, the text itself possesses a clarity of narrative that is largely absent from *Landor's Tower* and Sinclair's more overtly layered London psychogeographies. *Black Apples'* opening section, published fifteen years after *Landor's Tower*, doubles as a kind of apologia for *Landor's Tower's* shortcomings. While clearly different in tone as well as genre, *Black Apples* is both a

continuation of, and an attempt to redress, what seems to be a twofold failure (both deliberate and unintentional) of *Landor's Tower*. Where that novel is a deliberate parody of a 'failed' novel, its skewering of aspects of Welsh literary culture (such as the Hay Festival), were received with an unexpected rancour in Wales. In *Black Apples*, there are no asides about post-devolution Welsh literary culture (and the Academi 'boyos'), nor is there a focus on distinctly compromised incomers like Eric Gill and Walter Savage Landor. Instead, *Black Apples* considers Vernon Watkins (a tangential, but instrumental figure in Sinclair's early career), and Ceri Richards (whose lithograph of Dylan Thomas's 'Do not go gentle into that good night', 'travelled with [Sinclair] as a permanent backdrop, the perfectly realised metaphor for the futility of writing').¹⁷² Most importantly, *Black Apples* discusses the landscape of the Gower, without recourse to fiction.

The idea of the impossible (or doomed) novel, as well as the acceptance of its failure, are themes to which *Black Apples* returns. Sinclair volunteers his own interpretation of the reception of *Landor's Tower* at the beginning of *Black Apples*, in which he recalls the

justified criticism I faced, in Wales, for trying to re-establish a tentative connection with my homeland in a novel of the borders, *Landor's Tower*. I had forfeited all those advantages of birth, walked away from a bankable heritage.¹⁷³

Again, in the context of another of his 'Welsh' texts, it is not surprising for Sinclair to cast *Landor's Tower* as attempt to reconnect with Wales, as well as alluding to his regret (or

¹⁷² *Black Apples*, p. 95.

¹⁷³ *Black Apples*, p. 21.

shame) at leaving behind a 'bankable heritage'. Indeed, the adjective 'bankable' itself denotes Sinclair's residual discomfort at his early-career alienation from the Welsh poetry scene, into which acquaintances such as Finch and Torrance (both avant-garde poets), had managed to integrate.¹⁷⁴

So, while the source material for *Landor's Tower* results in a narrative of alienation and exile, Sinclair's second full-length attempt at a 'Welsh' book takes an entirely different approach. The origins of *Black Apples* are clearly present in *Landor's Tower*. Two significant points of confluence are Vernon Watkins (especially his poem *The Ballad of the Mari Llwyd*), and the original walk to the Paviland cave in the Gower. Sinclair alludes to the work of Watkins towards the end of *Landor's Tower*:

In his first collection, *The Ballad of the Mari Llwyd*, the dead return, challenging householders, those who grant entrance to their thoughts. Watkins worked within a secret tradition (the Black Apple of Gower), memories prompted by loss, sporadically witnessed immanence.¹⁷⁵

The landscape of Gower features sporadically in *Landor's Tower* (although the narrative doesn't encroach on its topography), as Norton describes a scene from the first Gower walk he undertook with Brian Catling (Joblard), which was catalogued in the *Albion Island Vortex* exhibition:

¹⁷⁴ Finch – who would go on to become head of Yr Academi Gymreig – becomes implicated as one of the 'boyos' from the Academi.

¹⁷⁵ *Landor's Tower*, p. 341. In *Landor's Tower* itself, Sinclair echoes Watkins' poem's motif of the dead returning in the resurrection of Prudence Pelham (as well as the resurrection of the eponymous Landor in the 'imaginary conversation' cited previously).

Joblard on a beach, an attaché case in his left hand, a coypu, suspended by the tail, in the other. Joblard edging his way across a limestone cliff, searching for the Paviland cave, the bones of the Red Woman of Gower. Gower the poet memorialised in St Saviour's, Southwark. South Walk.¹⁷⁶

Where Catling is thinly disguised in the fictional creation of Joblard in *Landor's Tower*, in *Black Apples* he appears under his own name. The hallucinatory elements of *Landor's Tower* (the 'visionary seizures' as Sinclair refers to them), are here evidenced in a dreamlike unspooling of the onomastic origins of the Gower, itself instigated by the coincidental naming of the poet John Gower. Southwark, London is thus transformed into the Gower coastal path: 'South Walk'.¹⁷⁷ Here the onomastic origins of Southwalk, London are connected (albeit vaguely) to Sinclair's original 'South Walk'.¹⁷⁸ In a riff on a kind of onomastic coincidence, Gower the poet and Gower the place are connected to one another, as well as Southwalk, London (a facet of Sinclair's adopted home territory) and the Gower 'South Walk' (close to, but not quite his homeland). This itself becomes a kind of linguistic *dérive*, drifting between connected words and geographies. Seemingly disconnected places are layered on top of one another as intertexts. Connections are made between London and Wales through coincidence and punning rather than tangible evidence. The text shifts between memory and fiction, and the three-tiered play on words creates a multi-layered

¹⁷⁶ *Landor's Tower*, p. 288.

¹⁷⁷ Sinclair notes the importance of onomastics in the original *Mabinogion* in his notes to *Landor's Tower*, Document: 'Outline', Folder: 'Landor's Tower: Notebook, Outline, Notes, p. 42.

¹⁷⁸ It is also worth remembering the significance of the 'onomastic tale', discussed in chapter five, which is significant in light of the residual *Mabinogion* influence in Sinclair's work.

thirdspace. It connects John Gower (the poet) to the Gower peninsula, and his tomb (in St. Saviour's Church, Southwark) to the Red Lady's tomb at Paviland. Finally, Southwark, London mutates into South Walk (as in a walk in the south of Wales).

This onomastic technique is uncannily echoed in *Black Apples*:

Now Culver Hole is no hole. It is anti-hole. A wall waiting to be listed as architecture.

A picture for the cover of the pink Landranger Ordnance Survey map, Number 159.

Culver Hole. *Culufre*. Culverhouse. Columbarium.¹⁷⁹

The cave takes the place of the tomb, and again Sinclair's prose drifts through both determinate and indeterminate geographies. Culverhouse most likely refers to Culverhouse Cross (a location with which Sinclair would be familiar as it is on the most likely route between Maesteg and Cardiff). Columbarium was once thought to be connected etymologically to both 'culver' and the old English 'culufre',¹⁸⁰ but *London Overground* (the book Sinclair was researching at the same time as *Black Apples*) offers a potential parallel: Sinclair's visit to 'Golders Green Crematorium, where we paid our respect to Freud's ashes', and 'touched the stone of assembly, a recent intervention proving the site of the Gorsedd of the Druids'.¹⁸¹ Once again distinct parallels between Sinclair's London and Welsh projects emerge, where *Black Apples* drifts into *London Overground* via associative wordplay, and real and imagined geographies occupy a single textual space.

¹⁷⁹ *Black Apples*, p. 40.

¹⁸⁰ 'culver', *OED* <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/45757>>

¹⁸¹ *London Overground*, p. 229.

The (Bankable) Heritage Industry

The principal (and physical) journey of *Black Apples* – to find the ‘Red Woman of Gower’ (or the ‘Red Lady of Paviland’) that Catling and Sinclair failed to locate in their previous attempt – is one that Sinclair has undertaken several times, but without success:

We never find it. Goat’s Hole, Paviland. The Red Lady. She was part of my evolving Welsh myth of origin, but I had yet to make her acquaintance, even though my visit to Swansea museum confirmed the fact that she was journeying under the wrong sexual passport.¹⁸²

Sinclair’s search for his ‘Welsh mythos’ turns into an attempt to discover his ‘evolving Welsh myth of origin’. *Black Apples* explores this by revisiting the Gower path (which itself has changed/evolved in his absence), but this new walk is preceded by a recounting of the two walks already undertaken (providing distinct pre- and post-devolution perspectives). He writes:

Arriving in Port Eynon with Anna, years after those other misremembered cliff walks, courtships and restorative escapes from London, here was an authentic return. A remaking for which the earlier attempts had been rehearsals. The morning of September 17, 2014 felt fresh and uncluttered. *And new*. This country had never been mine, but the persistent dream of it, a rather shop-soiled songline, held firm.

¹⁸² *Black Apples*, p. 82.

Myths of origin underwrote our planned excursion by recently sanctioned coast path to Rhossili.¹⁸³

This 'new' walk is an attempt at authenticity, at least as far as Sinclair is willing and as his style allows. This is itself a marked contrast to *Landor's Tower*, in which Sinclair laments that it was not what he 'had to say about Wales'. The quotation contains an implicit critique of post-devolution 'political Wales', as well as a critique of Sinclair's pursuit of his myth of origin. The language is anything but economical, but yet again is economically-driven. Rather than simply instigating (or providing the inspiration for) his return to the Gower, Sinclair's 'myth of origin', referred to earlier as his 'bankable heritage', is described as having 'underwr[itten]' the 'excursion'.¹⁸⁴

The 'recently sanctioned coast path' – announced by then First Minister Rhodri Morgan as the 'all-Wales coastal path' – was a Welsh Assembly Government proposal, part of a bid to boost tourism in Wales.¹⁸⁵ Sinclair's response to the new Gower coastal path (which is closer to his own *terroir* of Maesteg than Hay and the borderlands of *Landor's Tower*), is now 'obedient to the genre of the Celtic return'.¹⁸⁶ Sinclair's 'obedience' is to the 'newly sanctioned path', and the path itself functions as a metaphor for the change that has occurred in Wales during his exile.¹⁸⁷ He writes:

¹⁸³ *Black Apples*, p. 109.

¹⁸⁴ 'Underwrite', v. 1, 4c: 'To support by a guarantee of funds', *OED*
<<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/212248>>

¹⁸⁵ 'All-Wales coastal path proposed', *BBC News*, 09 June 2006
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/wales/north_west/5060910.stm>

¹⁸⁶ *Black Apples*, p. 11.

¹⁸⁷ The 'path' itself is a perfunctory metaphor for devolution in Wales, one used by former Secretary of State for Wales, Stephen Crabb, in a statement on devolution: 'I have led a

Earlier auguries of trespass beyond the permissions of maps and charts had faded away. The contemporary Gower walk was burnished in weekend colour supplements, flagged up on websites, heralded in top-ten lists everywhere. Another bright-eyed old couple tottered from the car park, hiking poles at the ready, coshed by bracing salt air. We nodded in acknowledgement and exchanged Alpine salutes.¹⁸⁸

The trespass of Sinclair's earlier 'South Walk' is constituted as distinct from this new walk, even though they cover the same terrain. The Gower walk has been colonised by the same 'heritage history' that has consumed South Wales in *The Valleys*. The 'new' walk takes a more sinister turn:

Some form of remote and beneficent kindle-control dictated the footsteps of obedient coast path backpackers. We might all have been tied together on a length of rope. There was no deviation from the approved route.¹⁸⁹

The new path is cast as something to be obeyed, a path from which one cannot deviate. It is both approved and sanctioned (by a political body, or a landowner), rather than a

series of discussions with the four main political parties in Wales and sought the views of others, including business and academic representatives, in order to establish where there is consensus on the future path of devolution in Wales.' 'Written Statement: Devolution in Wales', 27 February 2015
<<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmhansrd/cm150227/wmstext/150227m0001.htm>>

¹⁸⁸ *Black Apples*, p. 109.

¹⁸⁹ *Black Apples*, p. 110.

trespasser. It is nonetheless a telling reflection, not dissimilar to Sinclair's previous pronouncements on the folly of deviating from his London territory in *Landor's Tower*. The WAG exerts a 'beneficent', but ominous control over 'obedient [...] backpackers'. Elsewhere in *Black Apples*, Sinclair notices 'More madness for the Swansea Marina. More Premier Inns and tower blocks abraded by black sand from the shifting dunes. Ballardian lagoons are filled with income streams from money that does not yet exist, complacent government pumping in £90 - £95 of our tax harvest per megawatt hour of energy.'¹⁹⁰

The previous Gower walks (which were rendered in Sinclair's avant-garde poetry rather than the autobiographical mode of *Black Apples*) are described in vastly different terms:

A signifier for that period [1973] [...] was that we set out from Port Eynon, not with a decent Ordnance Survey map but with a badly drawn copy of [William] Blake's "Mundane Egg" diagram').¹⁹¹

Sinclair's dependence upon maps to textually reconstruct the Gower is evident, as are the specific references to the numbering of the Ordnance Survey maps used for his expeditions. The reluctance to use an OS map in the Gower is borne out of a suspicion of maps that is evident in his other works. For example, in *Lights Out for the Territory*, Sinclair notes that:

One of the more seductive ephemerals of the heritage industry is the Godfrey Edition of Old Ordnance Survey Maps [...] I noticed a shop that specialises in this

¹⁹⁰ *Black Apples*, p. 167

¹⁹¹ *Black Apples*, p. 70.

trade: the acquisition of a fraudulent pedigree, the hard evidence of a past that never existed [...] Old maps, with all their fictions intact.¹⁹²

In a letter to Dave McKean regarding early drafts of the art work for *Landor's Tower*, Sinclair suggests that the 'half title: *Landor's Tower (or, The Imaginary Conversations)* might be the place to ghost the map'.¹⁹³ Continuing on the theme of mapping in *Landor's Tower*, Sinclair writes that

Llanthony Priory is a location you could find on the Ordnance Survey (Landranger 161) in gothic script. You could very well repeat this walk. They issue leaflets telling you how to go about it. All anyone needs to know about Walter Savage Landor.¹⁹⁴

Ironically, Llanthony Priory (and Capel-y-ffin) are both omitted from the sections of Landranger 161 reprinted on the cover of *Landor's Tower*, but their location is implied by the sections that are included.

However, *Black Apples* still consistently alludes to its own construction of reality:

¹⁹² *Lights Out for the Territory: 9 Excursions in the Secret History of London* (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 205. In *Ghost Milk*, Sinclair writes that 'maps are deceptive, they entice you with pure white space [...] and then they hit you with tank traps, warning notices. MILITARY FIRING RANGE KEEP OUT.' *Ghost Milk*, p. 179.

¹⁹³ Document: 'Letter to Dave McKean', Folder: 'Sinclair, *Landor's Tower*, typescript draft', 31 August 2000, Harry Ransom Center.

¹⁹⁴ *Landor's Tower*, p. 306.

My life's journey was just beginning, even though I was close to its chronological finish. Nothing happened, nothing was real until I tapped out the first sentence. I would begin with the Horton swim. The deserted car park. The dunes. Anna hugging her knees, dozing off, and thinking her own thoughts.

Black Apples thus situates itself not only as another, more 'authentic' return narrative, but also provides a circularity to Sinclair's career. Sinclair's two 'Welsh book[s]' thus constitute a complex negotiation of the return of the exile. They are illustrative of a writer whose work (which spans various genres and media) traditionally forgoes complex, nuanced political engagement. Yet, Sinclair's 'Welsh book[s]' are both post-devolution texts. While Sinclair's career has been predominantly outside of Wales, his early engagement with Wales (or seeming lack thereof) is deeply embedded in his avant-garde poetry. His interest in and treatment of Welsh mythology shows the prevalence of Wales in his work, yet such references appear largely lost on the London-based audience with which he finds the majority of his success. When he does attempt his first Wales-located work in *Landor's Tower*, Wales itself (its geography and culture) appears through a deeply fragmented narrative in which devolution itself (and Welsh literary culture) becomes the object of an 'Academi boyos' caricature, one that has its roots in Sinclair's early attempts to write in or about Wales. The 'authentic return' of *Black Apples* provides a degree of closure to Sinclair's Welsh-project, and in its walk along the Gower path – one of the latest grand projects of devolved Wales – is perhaps the closest Sinclair has come to a discussion of contemporary Wales and its new political paradigm. Even given Sinclair's reticence to speak directly about Welsh politics (in comparison to Morris, for example), his writing is not entirely ambivalent about devolution. Within his London writing one can detect strands of Arthur Machen's

psychogeography, but the writing that will be discussed in Part Two presents yet stronger evidence of the influence of Sinclair's psychogeographical resistance writing in contemporary Welsh literature.

Part Two: Literature Since Devolution

Chapter Four: Literary Devolution in Context

Having discussed two writers whose careers were firmly established prior to devolution in Part One, Part Two of this thesis (comprising three chapters) will discuss some of the observable trends in post-devolution Welsh writing in English. In order to do so, a more thorough examination of the history and process of devolution is required. Where Morris and Sinclair were presented in Part One as emblematic of two strands of both conservative and resistant pre-devolution Anglophone Welsh writing, the writing discussed in this section provides evidence of the lasting impact of the discourse of devolution, as well as perhaps pointing toward the continuing influence of nationalism in contemporary Anglophone Welsh writing, and the influence of Sinclair and Welsh psychogeographical writing in post-devolution Wales.

It is not necessary to view devolution as a paradigm shifting moment in Welsh literature in order to perceive the effect on the body of work produced since 1997. However, it would be difficult to accurately measure whether the literature produced since 1997 has changed because of devolution, whether it is more nationalist, or within it is a perceivable, stronger sense of Welsh identity. The research of 'Devolved Voices', a post-devolution literature project based at Aberystwyth University which focuses exclusively on poetry (and poets) in Wales since devolution, appears to suggest that Anglophone Welsh poets don't necessarily feel a stronger sense of identification with Wales since devolution, or feel an increased desire to identify as Welsh. As Jarvis notes, 'political divergence from England (including the

institutional divergence of devolution itself) does not – perhaps somewhat counter-intuitively – necessarily equate to greater Welsh self-identification on the part of individuals.’¹ However, this is not tantamount to suggesting that writing in Wales has not been affected by devolution. It is demonstrably the case that the devolution of powers to the National Assembly for Wales has seen a change in funding allocation in the arts, as well as the creation of new institutions to allocate this funding. In this sense there has been a visible growth in Wales’s creative economy. This model is extensive and far reaching. Many Welsh publishers, and subsequently writers, are dependent on funding from the Welsh Books Council to varying degrees, and the following two chapters of this thesis will focus on several examples. However, to focus solely on the output of writers and publishers who have received public funding would be reductive, and fails to take into account writers who publish outside of this funding paradigm. The greater autonomy afforded to the Welsh Assembly to allocate its own funding for the arts (and consequently a greater accountability when such funding is threatened), has meant that the current administration in Wales has more control over what projects are funded than ever before.² Primarily, this is because prior to the establishment of the Welsh Assembly in 1999, the Westminster-appointed Welsh Office had no such control, and the Welsh Arts Council was funded directly by the Westminster government. The connection between taxpayers in Wales and the newly-emerging publicly-funded arts scene has arguably never been greater than in the period

¹ Matthew Jarvis, ‘Context: Wales and Devolution’, *Devolved Voices* website
<https://www.aber.ac.uk/devolvedvoices/?page_id=155>

² Recent Assembly proposals to cut funding of the Welsh Books Council recently met with fierce opposition from a range of Welsh writers and publishers. See David Deans, ‘Planned cut to Welsh Books Council grant scrapped after authors’ protests’, *Wales Online*, 20 January 2016
<<http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/politics/planned-cut-welsh-books-council-10763396>>

following devolution. And, while there have been a few dissenting voices from within the writing community as well as beyond, literature in Wales continues to be well-supported by the Welsh Books Council and a vibrant publishing scene. One could, in this instance, create a complex analysis of post-devolution writing in Wales that has been funded by either the Welsh Arts Council or the Welsh Books Council. To solely focus on this would undoubtedly place too much emphasis on the structural effects of devolution on Welsh writing, while also potentially ignoring the wider effect that devolution has had on understandings of Wales and Welshness. There are undoubtedly instances where this kind of analysis would be appropriate, such as in Seren's *New Stories from the Mabinogion* series, discussed in chapter five. It might be more instructive at this stage to point out one significant consequence of the grant-aided literary culture within Wales. One of the Welsh Books Council's conditions of funding for the three major magazines in Wales (*Planet*, *New Welsh Review*, and *Poetry Wales*) is that those magazines are 'charged within their remit to provide significant coverage of titles produced by Welsh or Wales-based authors, or by writers with a strong connection to Wales'.³ The model for publicly-funded literature in Wales in both languages has recently received a robust defence from authors and publishers both in Wales and beyond as recently January 2016, when significant cuts were mooted by the Welsh Government.⁴ The distribution of funding is also an issue worthy of attention, especially the way in which funding is distributed geographically, and its requirement to nurture writers 'with a strong connection to Wales'.

³ Kathryn Gray, 'Reviewing the Culture', *Devolved Voices*
<https://www.aber.ac.uk/devolvedvoices/?page_id=651>

⁴ See Alison Flood, 'Welsh authors rally against steep cuts to Books Council budget', *The Guardian*, 19 January 2016 <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/jan/19/welsh-authors-rally-against-steep-cuts-to-books-council-budget>>

The writers represented in this thesis don't articulate a universally agreed upon definition of Welshness, which is resistant to prescriptive definitions. While support for devolution in Wales has increased, according to Jones and Scully, 'in their basic sense of national identity they [the electorate] became no more Welsh at all'.⁵ Some of the writers discussed in this thesis are certainly more responsive in their work to the process of devolution. For one, Gwyneth Lewis, is entwined with the project in a distinctly material sense. Her poetic verse on the architectural façade of the Wales Millennium Centre is one of the emblems of post-devolution Welsh cultural nationalism and internationalism. Others respond to devolution with a greater degree of cynicism, such as Cardiff-based poet Peter Finch and his other *Real* series contemporaries. Iain Sinclair's writing suggests no sustained engagement with any aspect of contemporary Welsh politics (even taking into account his two 'Welsh' books), while English-born Jan Morris has embraced Welshness and Welsh nationalism to such an extent that in *A Machynlleth Triad* devolution is regarded as an ineffective compromise; an obstacle to be overcome on the path to full Welsh independence. Many of these authors attempt to render Wales's physical and cultural geography, in fiction, non-fiction, and poetry. The *Real* series includes some innovative maps to try to explain particular localities within Wales, and the series as a whole provides a unique, multi-authorial insight into historical divisions between north and south, east and west, urban and rural. Some writers create imaginary geographies (such as Lewis's science fiction rendering of Blodeuwedd in *The Meat Tree*, or Jan Morris's fictional utopia *Hav*), that are still discernibly Welsh spaces. Morris and Sinclair use the physical terrain of Trieste and London respectively to reflect on Wales beyond its physical borders, and the *Real* series itself is continuing its work beyond the Welsh border. Interestingly, and in a break from the approach of its first two English

⁵ *Wales Says Yes*, p. 71.

volumes, the series' most recent volume, *Real South Bank* makes no claims about London's Welshness (as it does about Liverpool and Bloomsbury). Devolution doesn't simply redefine or reassert Welsh spaces, but also has an impact upon the way in which English spaces might be discussed in a post-devolution context.

Overview of Devolution in Wales and the UK

Before discussing the potential impact of devolution on the literature of Wales (and indeed *vice versa*), it would be useful to outline what exactly devolution has meant for Wales. First, a broad definition of devolution in the United Kingdom:

The transfer of some powers from Parliament at Westminster to proposed Scottish and Welsh assemblies; also, the delegation of certain administrative functions from central government to provincial offices in Scotland and Wales.⁶

Devolution, while driven by an arguably similar impulse, should not be conflated with independence.⁷ Devolution is more similar to the Home Rule proposed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in Ireland (and achieved to an extent following the First World War). The most significant difference between devolution and independence is

⁶ 'Devolution', *Oxford English Dictionary*

<<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/51549?rskey=6sA8qo&result=1#eid>>

Note that this definition does not include Northern Ireland, which does have a devolved assembly, achieved under different circumstances as a result of the 'Good Friday Agreement' (1998). Ireland also had an independent central government from 1922 – the Republic replaced the Saorstát Éireann in 1937.

⁷ However, this does not mean to say that there is no overlap between the two (as seen in Jan Morris's work).

the former's retention of a central government in Westminster. It should also be noted that such movements do not exclude England, and there have been some suggestions that the arguments for leaving the EU in the 2016 referendum have been buoyed by a rise in English nationalism and desire for 'self-rule'.⁸ There is also the matter of the so-called 'West Lothian question' (also known as English votes for English laws), which garnered significant attention in England during the Scottish Independence referendum.⁹

While there has been consistent campaigning for the transition of powers to Wales from Westminster throughout the twentieth century (whether through Home Rule, independence, or devolution itself), the first referendum on the matter, held just months before Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister in 1979, was defeated with a majority of 79.7%.¹⁰ However, the intervening years between the unsuccessful 1979 referendum and the narrowly successful 1997 referendum saw massive economic upheaval in Wales during an uninterrupted period of Conservative party leadership in Westminster. This upheaval was evidenced in the Miners' Strike (1984-5), which was a response to the widespread closure of

⁸ Fintan O'Toole proposes this argument in an article entitled 'Brexit is being driven by English nationalism. And it will end in self-rule', *The Guardian*, 19 June 2016 <<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jun/18/england-eu-referendum-brexit>> O'Toole suggests that, considering the substantial Scottish (and to a lesser extent, Welsh) support for the EU, and the prospect of another independence referendum, '[a]fter Brexit, an independent England will emerge by default.' See also, Morgan, *Revolution to Devolution: Reflections on Welsh Democracy* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2014), p. 248.

⁹ English Votes for English Laws (EVEL) is discussed in Charlie Jeffery, Ailsa Henderson, Roger Scully, and Richard Wyn Jones, 'England's Dissatisfactions and the Conservative Dilemma', *Political Studies Review*, 14.3 (2016), 335–348. Kenneth O. Morgan suggests that greater devolution to the regions of England would render the West-Lothian question 'redundant', and that it is 'unanswerable as things stand', *Revolution to Devolution*, p. 265.

¹⁰ Richard Dewdney, 'Results of Devolution Referendums (1979 & 1997)', Research Paper No. 97/113 November 1997, p. 17. Available at: <<http://www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/RP97-113>> Any percentages cited for the 1979 and 1997 referendums can be found in Dewdney's report.

mines throughout Wales and the rest of the UK. John Osmond, in a paper for the Arts Council of Wales, 'The Lie of the Land' (2009), reflected on this moment as a political awakening in Wales:

[I]n the midst of the 1984-5 miners [sic] strike, a new Wales was being birthed into existence, albeit in the most painful of circumstances. Most who lived through it will recall feeling how even at the time it felt like a momentous event. With hindsight it can be seen as the hinge of a pivotal decade in Welsh history that opened the door between the 1979 and 1997 devolution referendums.¹¹

The closure of the mines in the UK had a significant impact in Wales, and according to Osmond was instrumental in altering the opinions of the Welsh electorate, specifically those in English speaking areas that had so convincingly voted against devolution in 1979.¹² While Wales has elected its own MPs to the UK Parliament, successive unpopular appointments to the position of Welsh Secretary – a senior appointment made by the UK government – often highlighted perceivable schism within a large section of the Welsh electorate who felt that they granted no mandate for a Conservative government. John Osmond summarises this

¹¹ John Osmond, 'The Lie of the Land: Investment Review Discussion Paper', *Arts Council of Wales* (2009), p. 7. <http://www.arts.wales/c_funding/john-osmond-the-lie-of-the-land> It should be noted at this point that the term 'referendums' will be used, rather than 'referenda'. While the third edition (1989) of the *Oxford English Dictionary* does not suggest a preferred term, the second edition (2009) recommends 'referendums' (as used by Osmond). <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/160850?redirectedFrom=referendum>>

¹² See 'The Lie of the Land', p. 5. As was discussed in chapter three, Iain Sinclair's work also incorporates features of his hometown Maesteg, a former mining town. While Sinclair's 'Welshness' has consistently been questioned or ignored (within Wales at least), his work also bears the hallmarks of some of his Welsh contemporaries, and he was anthologised in Wales in *Green Horse: An Anthology of Young Poets of Wales*, Meic Stephens and Peter Finch eds. (Swansea: Cristopher Davies, 1978).

period as follows: 'The excesses of Conservatism that were washed across the border by the likes of English Secretaries of State for Wales, John Redwood and William Hague, did a great deal to focus Welsh solidarity in response.'¹³ Hence, when the 1997 referendum passed by a majority of 0.6%, there was significant political upheaval in Wales. Most immediately, visible changes occurred in the city of Cardiff, in which the National Assembly for Wales was established. However, given the fine margin on which the vote was decided, the vote could hardly be said to be unequivocally unifying. There was also recognisable irony in the new assembly being housed in a city that voted against devolution (a majority of 55.6% against), whereas other suggested venues for the Assembly such as Aberystwyth (with a 56.8% majority in favour) were overlooked.

Devolution in a UK Context

While the devolution referendum revealed interesting (but not surprising) disparities between various geographical areas of Wales, several more referendums held in Wales and the UK after 1997 have exposed national contrasts regarding support for the central Westminster-based UK government. Any discussion of devolution in Wales must take into consideration the wider context of devolution in the rest of the United Kingdom. Northern Ireland's devolved Assembly was established following the Good Friday Agreement, signed on 10 April, 1998. The Scottish Parliament was established following a referendum on 11 September 1979 (held a week prior to the Welsh devolution referendum). Scotland returned a significantly higher majority in 1979 than Wales (48.6%), but a recent

¹³ John Osmond, 'Welsh Civil Identity in the Twenty-First Century', in *Celtic Geographies: Old Culture, New Times*, D. C. Harvey, R. Jones, N. McNroy, and C. Milligan, eds. (London: Routledge, 2002), 69-88, p. 74.

referendum on further powers being devolved to Wales (in 2011), returned a higher majority than in 1997 (63.49%), while also being notable for a diminished voter turnout. Given that the second referendum granted legislative (law-making) power to the Assembly, it has had an arguably more substantial impact than that of 1997.¹⁴ Recently there have been smaller (but still significant) events such as the UK government granting Cornwall ‘minority status’ in 2014 (for which no referendum took place), and such events are part of a growing movement towards an increased devolution of power to regional governments in the UK.¹⁵

So, devolution in the constituent parts of the UK varies in both the pace of implementation, and the degree of public support. In the case of Scotland, this led to an independence referendum on 18 September 2014 that was ultimately rejected by the Scottish electorate by a margin of 55.3% to 44.7%.¹⁶ The voter turnout in Scotland’s independence referendum (84.5%) indicates that the choice available to voters was of greater significance than, for example, the outcome of the UK government general elections that preceded it in 2010 (63.8%), and succeeded it in 2015 (71.1%).¹⁷ On the Scottish turnout, Roger Scully suggests:

While this was, in the end, no great shock – reflecting the extraordinary levels of public engagement and participation generated by the referendum campaign – it

¹⁴ The 2011 referendum is discussed in detail in Richard Wyn Jones and Roger Scully, *Wales Says Yes: Devolution and the 2011 Welsh Referendum* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2012).

¹⁵ See ‘Cornish people granted minority status within UK’, *BBC News*, 24 April 2014 <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-cornwall-27132035>>

¹⁶ For more detail about the results, see <<https://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/scottish-independence-referendum/about>>

¹⁷ See ‘Scotland Decides’, *BBC News* (undated) <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/events/scotland-decides/results>>

was still something that in a broader context should be seen as quite remarkable. On *no* previous occasion in the democratic era had such a high percentage of the Scottish electorate participated in a ballot.¹⁸

Going on to (correctly) predict that voter turnout in the subsequent general election would be significantly lower, Scully draws attention to the fact that such turnout levels are not only remarkable, but historic. The degree of public engagement with the Scottish independence referendum, in contrast with a general election (or even Scottish parliament elections), serves to emphasise the importance of self-governance as an issue in late twentieth-century and early twenty-first century UK political history. Reflecting (and probably affecting) the degree of public engagement with the referendum, a number of high profile Scottish writers, such as Val McDermid, Irvine Welsh, and Iain Banks actively campaigned for a 'Yes' vote.¹⁹

The most recent referendum in the UK on membership of the European Union, which was dominated by arguments about sovereignty and immigration, revealed a gulf between the Remain and Leave sides of the debate, ultimately resulting in a victory for Leave by a margin of 51.9% to 48.1% (with a 72.2% turnout). However, reflecting a division between the

¹⁸ Roger Scully, 'Who Will Vote', *Elections in Wales - Etholiadau yng Nghymru*, 29 September 2014 <<http://blogs.cardiff.ac.uk/electionsinwales/2014/09/29/who-will-vote/>>

¹⁹ See 'Scottish writers on the referendum – independence day?', *The Guardian*, 19 July 2014 <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/jul/19/scottish-referendum-independence-uk-how-writers-vote?INTCMP=sfl>>, and 'Scottish independence: literature and nationalism', *The Guardian*, 19 July 2014 <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/jul/19/scottish-independence-literature-nationalism?INTCMP=sfl>>. Also, Iain Banks wrote an article in support of independence, 'Scottish independence: divorce makes sense for both parties', *The Guardian*, 17 May 2013 <<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2013/may/17/scottish-independence-parties>>

constituent parts of the UK that had been partially revealed by the 2014 Scottish independence referendum, Scotland resoundingly voted 'Remain' (62% Remain, turnout 67.2%), as did Northern Ireland (55.8% Remain, turnout 62.9%). Wales voted to leave the EU with a 52.5% majority (turnout: 71.7%), and was more closely aligned with the overall English vote to leave of 53.4% (turnout: 72%).²⁰ Following the EU referendum, there is a real prospect of further changes to the internal geographical make-up of the UK, as well as its wider international political relationships. Since the referendum, Scottish independence has returned to the political agenda, and in response Plaid Cymru have re-emphasised their pledge for an independence referendum in Wales.²¹

Post-devolution literature in Wales must also now be understood within the wider context of the expansion of the European Union and what might now, in the wake of the vote to leave the EU, be understood as a challenge to previous assumptions of Welsh-Europeanism. The following quotation, taken from Werner Sollors's review of a collection of Raymond Williams's writings on Wales, captures part of the essence of post-devolution critiques of Welsh nationalism:

At a time when the European Union is strengthening supranational and regional ties and the left is trying to make sense of various particularistic identities, Williams's

²⁰ See the Electoral Commission report for a more detailed breakdown of the results: <<http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/find-information-by-subject/elections-and-referendums/upcoming-elections-and-referendums/eu-referendum/electorate-and-count-information>>

²¹ See: 'Brexit: Nicola Sturgeon says second Scottish independence vote "highly likely"', *BBC News*, 24 June 2016 <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-36621030>>, and 'It's time to put Welsh independence on agenda', *The Guardian*, 27 June 2016 <<http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jun/27/its-time-to-put-welsh-independence-on-agenda-leanne-wood>>

‘Welsh-European’ writing, his ‘regionally shaded’ cultural critique, deserves the widest attention.²²

The blurb on the back cover of the collection *Who Speaks for Wales?*, advertises an ‘emphasis’ on ‘the continuing relevance of [Williams’s] thought for post-devolution Wales.’²³ The extent to which the EU will continue to strengthen its ‘supranational ties’ is of course still unclear, and the rise of anti-EU sentiment across the continent has been widely reported.²⁴ However, it is conceivable that, just as this thesis will explore the ways in which devolution has had an effect on twentieth-century Welsh culture, the EU referendum will also begin to have an effect on literature in Wales. Indeed, some of the works discussed in this thesis have received EU funding as well as funding from the Welsh Assembly. While it is important to emphasise that Welsh Europeanism existed prior to the UK joining the European Union in 1973, Williams’s contribution to conceiving of a modern European Welshness (or Welsh-Europeanness) remains significant. The shifting picture of Welsh Europeanism, as reflected by the tangible results of a referendum, must once again be reassessed along non-party political lines. As John Osmond notes in *Welsh Europeans*:

In the 1990s Raymond Williams’ legacy is making an immense contribution to the construction of a relevant and contemporary social consciousness. [...] It was he who

²² Werner Sollors, review of Raymond Williams, *Who Speaks for Wales? Nation, Culture, Identity*, Daniel Williams ed. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003).

²³ *ibid.*

²⁴ See ‘Frexit, Nexit or Oexit? Who will be next to leave the EU’, *The Guardian* 27th June 2016 <<http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jun/27/frexit-nexit-or-oexit-who-will-be-next-to-leave-the-eu>>, and ‘EU faces Brexit “contagion” as populist parties across Europe call for referendums’, *The Telegraph* 24th June 2016 <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/06/24/eu-faces-brexit-contagion-as-populist-parties-across-europe-call/>>

offered us the idea that we could find a culture in which we could breathe by re-making ourselves once more, but this time as Welsh Europeans.²⁵

The idea of re-making Welsh culture is a familiar one, and in the aftermath of the devolution referendum there was no shortage of suggestions from writers and artists in Wales about how such change might take shape. Williams was not alone in advocating a Euro-centric approach to modern Welshness, as opposed to one that could be perceived as nostalgically conservative. Early issues of the influential *Planet* magazine (subtitled *The Welsh Internationalist*) also emphasised and encouraged links with European artists (such as Basque and Breton writers) in order to present a pan-European defence of minority cultures in danger of becoming overwhelmed by more powerful neighbours and the forces of globalisation.

As Roger Scully argues, there is little to be gleaned from comparing the results of the EU referendum directly with the results of the devolution referendums of 1997 and 2011.

The correlation coefficient between 2016 voting and 1997 is 0.012 – in other words virtually no relationship at all. And the coefficient for 2016 compared with 2011 is 0.000 – absolutely no relationship whatsoever! So whatever else it was related to, voting in this referendum was not related – at the aggregate level at least – to how people voted on Welsh devolution either in 1997 or 2011.²⁶

²⁵ John Osmond, *Welsh Europeans* (Bridgend: Seren, 1995), p. 14.

²⁶ Roger Scully, 'The EU Referendum: the Welsh Verdict', *Elections in Wales - Etholiadau yng Nghymru*, 24 June 2016 <<http://blogs.cardiff.ac.uk/electionsinwales/2016/06/24/the-eu-referendum-the-welsh-verdict/>>

Gideon Rachman has suggested that ‘the Brexit vote is also part of a more recent and more international phenomenon: a populist backlash in western politics against globalization.’²⁷ In this case Williams’s ‘regionally shaded’ critique of Welsh culture, suggested by Sollors to be a counterpoint to the EU’s supranationalism, might now be seen as a prescient warning of the pitfalls of globalisation. In Williams’s writing on Wales, there is an emphasis on cultural, as opposed to political, nationalism (a distinction explored in more detail in relation to Jan Morris in chapter two). Daniel Williams, in his introduction to the volume, argues that (Raymond) Williams ‘seeks to maintain a distinction between the culturally defined “people” and the politically defined “state”.’²⁸ However, the move towards creating a democracy in Wales that is more representative of Welsh (as opposed to wider British) interests is perhaps changing the nature of this separation. For instance, unlike England, for example, the Welsh Assembly elections utilise a method of proportional representation, rather than the traditional ‘First Past the Post’ system.²⁹

However, it is important to restate that comparisons between Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish devolution are potentially reductive, and can fail to take into account the different relationships that each nation has with the UK as a whole. In *Revolution to Devolution* Kenneth O. Morgan suggests that the ‘profound differences’ between the situations in the constituent parts of the UK ‘were reflected, perhaps excessively so, in the asymmetrical

²⁷ Gideon Rachman, ‘Brexit and the making of a global crisis’, *The Financial Times*, 24 June 2016 <<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/5490d754-3a0e-11e6-9a05-82a9b15a8ee7.html#axzz4DSICtvqe>>

²⁸ Daniel Williams, in his introduction to *Who Speaks for Wales*, p. xxxiii.

²⁹ See the Welsh Assembly website for more information on the D’Hondt formula: <<http://www.assembly.wales/en/gethome/elections-referenda/Pages/abt-nafw-how-assembly-elected.aspx>>

devolution accorded to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland by the Blair government in 1997.³⁰ Richard Wyn Jones and Roger Scully also note that the prospect of a Welsh referendum wasn't originally part of the then leader of the Labour Party Tony's Blair's original general election manifesto:

[...] Wales did not feature in the original decision [to promise a referendum to Scotland]. Blair seems to have believed that Welsh devolution was fundamentally different from Scottish devolution, given the much more limited powers envisaged for the Welsh Assembly.³¹

There was and continues to be a distinct imbalance between the ways in which devolution has been implemented throughout the UK. While both Scotland and Wales held devolution referendums on the same day in 1979 (both unsuccessful) and 1997 (both successful), since 1997 the Assembly governments of each country have progressed at a markedly different pace from one another. The degree of public support for devolution also varies (as evidenced by the landslide victory for devolution in Scotland and the marginal victory in Wales). Morgan historicises this level of public support in the context of the asymmetrical nature of the union between these countries of the UK, stating that '[m]odern Scotland is the product of an Act of Union, between two sovereign states, passed in 1707', whereas '[m]odern Wales is the product of an act of conquest, imposed on a defeated and fragmented people by Edward I over four hundred years earlier'.³² This is a point also

³⁰ Kenneth O. Morgan, *Revolution to Devolution*, p. xii.

³¹ Richard Wyn Jones and Roger Scully, *Wales Says Yes: Devolution and the 2011 Welsh Referendum*, pp. 15-16.

³² Morgan, *Revolution to Devolution*, pp. 248-9.

argued by Gordon MacLeod (developing on work conducted by Michael Hechter and Margaret Levi), who suggests that as a result of differing terms of Scotland's integration into the union, 'Scotland's elite representatives in various spheres of civic life were able to carve out a conceptual and institutional shape relatively autonomous from the British state.'³³ This latter point has significant consequences for the development of national culture in Scotland and Wales, given that the former had support at an institutional level in a way that the latter did not.

Welsh Writing in English Since Devolution

While there was undoubtedly a direct response from some writers in Wales to devolution, literary and cultural critics within Wales have also played a role in attempting to reconceptualise Welsh writing after the 1997 referendum.³⁴ Whether the effects of devolution continue to be clearly observable in Welsh writing in either language is a debate that cannot be settled in this thesis (especially given that devolution should be viewed as an ongoing process, rather than as an event).³⁵ Also, any attempt to do so will potentially be superseded by the broader question of what will perhaps come to be known as post-Brexit literature, especially given its potential impact upon funding for the arts in the UK.

³³ Gordon MacLeod, 'Identity, Hybridity and the Institutionalisation of Territory: On the Geohistory of Celtic Devolution', in *Celtic Geographies: Old Culture, New Times*, p. 59.

³⁴ For example, the Leverhulme-funded project 'Devolved Voices' (based at Aberystwyth University), has been researching the emergence of poetry in Wales since the devolution referendum. <<https://www.aber.ac.uk/devolvedvoices/>>

³⁵ The phrase 'Devolution is a process and not an event' is often attributed to the former Secretary of State for Wales, Ron Davies.

If comparing Scottish and Welsh devolution is problematic, this is potentially exacerbated by an attempt to compare the way in which the discourse of devolution has evolved in each nation. Scotland's longer history of autonomy, and the different way in which it became incorporated into the United Kingdom, factors into its respective cultural output. This autonomy is expanded upon by Morgan, who suggests that in the nineteenth century

The Scottish aristocracy [...] became themselves bearers of a new sense of national identity. The Welsh have produced many remarkable men of letters from Dafydd ap Gwilym to R.S. Thomas (and latterly a few women, too), but it is a matter of profound historical significance that there has never been a Welsh Walter Scott.³⁶

It is important to remember that although similar, devolution in Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland occurred at different rates and under different circumstances. So, while there are clear parallels between the implementation of devolution in constituent parts of the UK (even extending to the regional devolution occurring in England), there are also clear problems with Morgan's contention about Wales's lack of a literary figure like Walter Scott. While Morgan's point is perhaps ill-expressed, there might be some truth in the fact that Wales lacks a comparable literary figurehead (especially in the way in which Scott's novels commute a clear sense of national narrative into fiction, and thus in turn reinforce a clearer sense of national identity).³⁷ Indeed, as Morgan emphasises, the asymmetrical nature of the

³⁶ *Revolution to Devolution*, p. 251.

³⁷ While there are clearly many worthy candidates, including the two mentioned by Morgan, this thesis offers no such alternatives, in order to refrain from what M. Wynn Thomas referred to in a recent lecture as 'boosterism', or the 'shameless hyping of Wales' in order to the strengthen 'the weak Welsh sense of self-worth'. M. Wynn Thomas, 'Studying Wales Today: A Microcosmopolitan Approach', *The Annual Lecture of the Learned Society of Wales*

incorporation of Scotland and Wales into the Union has had an observable impact upon the respective cultural output of the two nations. There is, however, questionable validity in a statement that the lack of a 'Welsh Walter Scott' marks a profound difference between Scotland and Wales, and narratives such as this can simply reinforce cultural stereotypes.

Compounding (or contributing to) this issue of the lack of a 'Welsh Walter Scott' is the relative separation between the study of Welsh and English language literature in Wales. This thesis discusses several bilingual authors, but is predominantly focused on their English-language output. The study of Welsh writing in English also has had to contend with several inconsistencies in the way in which the field is defined. Glyn Jones suggested that Welsh writing in English can be defined as 'those Welsh men and women who write in English about Wales'.³⁸ This definition, however logical, is problematic. While Jones's definition rightly identifies Welsh writers who write 'about Wales' as contributing to the genre of Welsh writing in English, it neglects two significant categories of writing: Welsh writers who write in English about non-Welsh themes or locations, and non-Welsh writers who write about Wales. There are numerous examples throughout the twentieth century of writers born outside of Wales, who have written distinctly Welsh texts, and these have been incorporated into the critical discussion of Welsh writing in English. Many of the authors discussed in the following two chapters of this thesis fit with Jones's parameters. However, neither Iain Sinclair nor Jan Morris (the foci of Part One) fit with Jones's definition. This

and the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion (December 2016). Full transcript available here:

<<https://www.cymdeithasddysgedig.cymru/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/STUDYING-WALES-TODAY.pdf>>

³⁸ Glyn Jones, *The Dragon Has Two Tongues: Essays on Anglo-Welsh Writers and Writing*, Tony Brown ed. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001), p. 37.

thesis does not consider the lack of 'Welshness' (or Welsh-identification) as a barrier to discussion within the field of Welsh writing in English, and neither does it stipulate that the writing must be 'about' Wales. In fact, some of the most significant insights into writing Wales after devolution discussed in this thesis are found in texts that are neither set in, nor ostensibly 'about', Wales.

In more recent critical discourse the divide between the two languages has come under increasing scrutiny. Statements such as those of R.S. Thomas – who suggested of 'Anglo-Welsh' writing (an anachronistic term for Welsh writing in English), that 'hyphenisation is betrayal' – are reflective of a mid-twentieth century moment in Welsh literature in which the culture, even the contemporaneous political debates surrounding the fate of the language, reflected a growing factionalism.³⁹ M. Wynn Thomas, in an essay on 'the two literatures of modern Wales', lamented that:

[A]t times, scholars of Anglo-Welsh literature seem to almost conspire together with their Welsh-language counterparts to give the impression that the history of modern Wales can be neatly divided between the two literatures, with industrial experience being the monopoly of the Anglo-Welsh and rural life being the preserve of the Welsh.⁴⁰

Clearly, as Thomas states, the language in which a text is written has historically been used as shorthand for both its location and subject matter. The basis of this dichotomy is

³⁹ R.S. Thomas, *Cymru or Wales?* (Llandysul: Gomer, 1992), p. 30.

⁴⁰ M. Wynn Thomas, 'Hidden Attachments: aspects of the relationship between the two literatures of modern Wales', *Welsh Writing in English*, 1 (1995), 145-63, p. 152.

discussed in Part One of this thesis, in which Morris espouses a more rural, Welsh-language Cymreictod, and Sinclair offers an Anglophone focus on southern, post-industrial Wales. While Thomas is keen to point out that actually there is a significant degree of overlap between the two literatures of Wales – the ‘two tongues’ referred to by Jones – there is also a less readily acknowledged degree of overlap between Welsh literature and wider UK and international literatures.⁴¹ As Jeremy Hooker notes:

The historical relationship between England and Wales is notoriously problematic. One literary consequence of this is that it has not been easy for Welsh writers in English, or their critics, to acknowledge debts to English influences.⁴²

It might appear anachronistic to reclaim certain texts as ‘Welsh’, but in the context of a modern UK in which political power is increasingly being dispersed throughout the regions, it remains an issue worthy of debate. This thesis will necessitate an approach that looks beyond the borders of Wales, and as such reflects a growing number of different ‘Welshnesses’.

Literary Culture in Wales After Devolution

In an editorial for the *New Welsh Review*, Francesca Rhydderch emphasises the connection between politics and the arts in a devolved Wales:

⁴¹ See Jones, *The Dragon Has Two Tongues*.

⁴² Jeremy Hooker, *Imagining Wales: A View of Modern Welsh Writing in English* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001), p. 3.

The importance of the (Wales Millennium) Centre is as much symbolic as anything else: the fact that it has even come into existence shows (both to the people of Wales and to the rest of the world) that the arts *matter* in Wales, and that those who hold the purse strings believe they matter too. But even while the last firework sent a flare into the sky over Cardiff Bay, Wales's politicians were busy stoking the bonfire of the quangos just a few yards away at the National Assembly.

[...] The notion that the Assembly can take on strategic planning for the arts as a whole also seems strange, despite their proposal to create a Culture Board which will include representation for ACW and other key players such as the Welsh Books Council.⁴³

The Wales Millennium Centre acts as a national and international symbol for how the devolved Welsh government, here described as ‘those who hold the purse strings’, should play a public role in supporting the arts. The Centre itself, which stands in close proximity to the Senedd (the building that houses the National Assembly), was partially funded by the National Assembly for Wales, which provided £37 million of the £106 million it cost to build. The National Assembly also provides annual grants to maintain the Centre’s programme of events. As an additional consequence of devolution, the responsibility for allocating funding for the arts, in subsidies for venues like the Millennium Centre, as well as Wales-based publishers, has been increasingly devolved. In simple terms, devolution has thus resulted in an observable change in both the built environment in Cardiff, as well as a change in the publicly funded arts landscape. The majority of the texts discussed in this thesis acknowledge (via their publishers) the financial assistance of the Welsh Books Council,

⁴³ Francesca Rhydderch, ‘Devolution or Dissolution?’, *New Welsh Review*, 66 (2004), p. 2.

which is the body that allocates funding for literature, and some authors were in direct receipt of individual grants to support their work. The work of the Welsh Government can also be seen directly in such projects as the Library of Wales series (which has republished some significant English-language Welsh texts), which is described as ‘a Welsh Government project designed to ensure that all of the rich and extensive literature in Wales that has been written in English will now be made available to readers in and beyond Wales’.⁴⁴ So, while there has been a visible attempt from the devolved administration to establish itself as key to the production of literature in Wales, it has also, in the Library of Wales, committed to establishing a series that seeks to ‘bring back into play the voices and actions of the human experience that has made us, in all our complexity, a Welsh people.’⁴⁵

When considering devolution and its potential impact on literature in Wales, it is important to distinguish between two distinct issues. First, how much of an effect, if any, has devolution had on literature and arts funding in Wales? Second, how has devolution affected the way in which the arts are discussed within Wales? The first question points us to the structural changes in Welsh literature (and the transition from a ‘quangoland’ to a series of autonomous funding bodies).⁴⁶ For example, the various official bodies that allocate funding for the arts consequently have an impact on the type of culture that is propagated (such as the Library of Wales series). The second question does not assume an affirmative answer to the first. Rather, one should be sceptical about definitively stating the effect of devolution on the arts in Wales. For example, Owen Sheers’s *Resistance* is an

⁴⁴ See the Library of Wales website for more information:

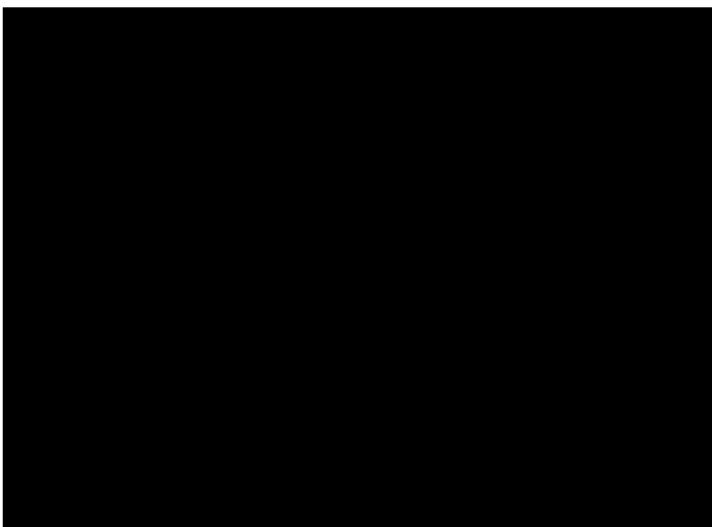
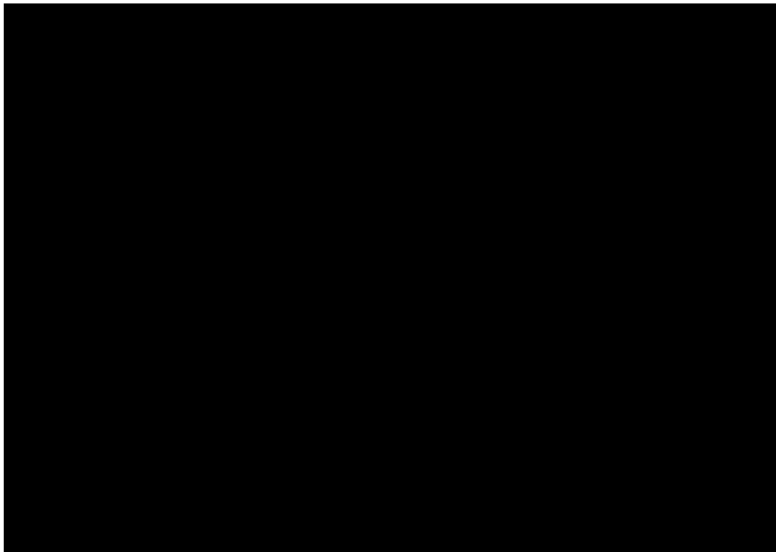
<<http://thelibraryofwales.com/contact>>

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ For a detailed discussion of quangos in Wales prior to devolution, see Martin Johnes, *Wales Since 1939*, pp. 323-4; John Osmond, *Welsh Europeans*, pp. 43-52.

alternative history set during the Second World War, and its characters, plot and setting could hardly be said to directly reflect the effects of devolution. However, as a book written by a Welsh author, set in the borderland between Wales and England, written and published in the wake of devolution by a London-based publisher, many of the questions just mentioned are pertinent to a reading of it.

The question of what constitutes a devolved Welsh text is thus comprised of many smaller questions. Consider Jonathan Edwards's poem 'Anatomy', included in his recent collection of poetry, *My Family and Other Superheroes*:



is the Severn Bridge, seen from the English side.⁴⁷

Edwards's poem does not specifically mention devolution, but it undoubtedly contains many themes pertinent to the discourse of devolution in Wales. The first stanza relates to the geography of Wales, its most spectacular natural sites and its significant man-made ones. For instance, the A470 is the road that connects north and south Wales, while simultaneously bisecting Wales along a similar line to the division between the 'Yes' and 'No' votes of the devolution referendum (discussed in more detail in relation to the *Real* series). The second stanza refers to Henry VIII's Act of Union of 1536, which reinforced English rule over Wales. The speaker's connection of this 'act' to their tongue is doubly significant, given that the Act of Union made English the official language of the courts in Wales. The Act also prevented Welsh speakers from receiving public office. This has now been superseded by strengthened provisions for the Welsh language since devolution, perhaps most significantly in the Government of Wales Act (1998), which ensures that Welsh is now a language of government (and equal with English). '[P]neumoconiosis', is a medical term referring to disease of the lungs suffered mainly by miners. Furthering the historical mining connection is the reference to Dic Penderyn, a miner hanged following his involvement in the Merthyr Rising.⁴⁸ These uniquely Welsh references culminate in the image of the speaker's eyes, which have been buried 'underground for generations', presumably due to English rule, but are now 'adjusting to the light'. It is a poem in which the subtext of devolution is never far from the surface, a text that clearly displays the effects of devolution without explicitly being *about* devolution.

⁴⁷ Jonathan Edwards, 'Anatomy', in *My Family and Other Superheroes* (Bridgend: Seren, 2014), p. 23.

⁴⁸ A 19th century working class rebellion in Wales.

Perhaps the definitive post-devolution text is Gwyneth Lewis's poem, inscribed on the Wales Millennium Centre: 'CREU GWIR FEL GWYDR O FFWRNAIS AWEN/ IN THESE STONES HORIZONS SING'.⁴⁹ The English text is not a direct translation of the Welsh, which is 'Creating truth like glass from inspiration's furnace'. The image of the 'furnace' has a double meaning, referring to both the use for the coal mined from the Welsh landscape, and the creative inspiration that such a landscape has nurtured. The Welsh 'stones' emphasise the economic importance of the Welsh slate quarries, which are then manifest in the materials from which the Centre is constructed. The image of 'horizons' singing pre-empts any accusation of parochialism, suggesting an internationalist outlook and a sense of Wales's place in an international community, rather than simply in relation to the England and the UK. Also, Lewis's composing in both languages isn't simply an act of translation, as neither text is the equivalent of the other. This neatly deconstructs the idea of the translation of corresponding cultures, making it clear that each language has its own intrinsic value to the production, in the literal and metaphorical sense, of Welsh culture. The poem is central to the Cardiff Bay area, and is geographically prominent. It is an example of the kind of text that would not exist were it not for devolution, commissioned to adorn one of the most prominent architectural symbols of devolution in Wales. Other areas, such as Aberystwyth Promenade, has also received substantial funding for regeneration. Following in this trend for public poetry, in an echo of Lewis's Millennium Centre poem, intrinsic to this redevelopment is the inclusion of lines of verse written by local schoolchildren with the

⁴⁹ A short piece on the poem can be found on Gwyneth Lewis's website:
<http://www.gwynethlewis.com/biog_millenniumcentre.shtml>

former Children's Poet Laureate Eurig Salisbury (all of which was funded as part of a Welsh Assembly Government initiative).⁵⁰

So, there is a substantial body of literature that contains references to devolution. The literary community in Wales, via its magazine culture, played a significant role in incubating arguments about devolution and home rule between the defeated referendum of 1979 and the successful vote in 1997.⁵¹ Immediately after the result in the latter referendum, several writers described their emotional response upon hearing the result of the 1997 vote. 'An Execrably Tasteless Farewell to Viscount No', a poem written by Nigel Jenkins, appeared in the first edition of the *New Welsh Review* published after the result. The poem is powerfully rhetorical, removing any ambiguity surrounding the marginal victory of 0.6%, and declared that 'The Viscount of No, Wales rejoice, is dead [...] Now he's a No-vote, / His goody-buckled-two-shoes dancing aflame/ In his Hell of our Yes'.⁵² In the subsequent pages of the same edition, a section on the reactions of three Welsh writers ('Ffiw') is evidence of a more cautious, but nonetheless optimistic, reaction that abounded in the writing community following the result, and Jenkins's own contribution to this latter section is certainly more

⁵⁰ See the Ceredigion Council website for more information:

<<https://www.ceredigion.gov.uk/English/Business/Regeneration/Aberystwyth-Regeneration-Area/Promenade-Verses/Pages/default.aspx>> The website also includes a section on the benefits of public arts:

<<https://www.ceredigion.gov.uk/SiteCollectionDocuments/Business/regeneration/promenade-improvements.pdf>>

⁵¹ *Planet* magazine (and its contributors) clearly played a key role, and initially ceased publication in response to the result of the 1979 referendum. Its then editor, Ned Thomas, cited several reasons for ceasing publication in his editorials 'Come in Planet – Your Time is Up', *Planet* 49/50 (January 1980), and 'As I Was Saying', *Planet* 51 (1985), both republished in *Compass Points: Jan Morris Introduces A Selection From the First Hundred Issues of Planet* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1993).

⁵² Nigel Jenkins, 'An Execrably Tasteless Farewell to Viscount No', *New Welsh Review* 38 (1997), p. 5. The poem was subsequently republished in the Meic Stephens edited *Poetry 1900-2000: One Hundred Poets from Wales* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2007), p. 667.

measured than his poem. Gillian Clarke notes that '[o]ne of the most exciting challenges in the recent past [is], if we want to be a nation we, the artists, must build it in the imaginations of the people. Let's to it'.⁵³ However, the immediate response of writers such as Jenkins and Clarke isn't necessarily reflective of the feelings of the wider Welsh electorate (of which many of the writers discussed in this thesis are also a part). Discussing this potential disparity, Matthew Jarvis suggests that Welsh writers were 'substantially less equivocal' in their support of devolution than the Welsh electorate at large who, as suggested by Roger Scully and Richard Wyn Jones, 'remained to be convinced' about the merits of devolution.⁵⁴ However, in order to adequately represent the range of views on the subject of devolution, any causal links between devolution and a paradigmatic shift in literature in Wales will remain tentative for the time being.

Writing that comments directly upon devolution (such as the poems by Edwards and Lewis above) is worthy of critical attention, and some representative texts will be discussed in the following two chapters of this thesis. However, it is important to emphasise that the way in which Welsh and non-Welsh spaces are rendered in post-devolution literature is affected by a much larger set of local, national, and global circumstances and concerns: events such as the 11 September attacks in New York; the financial crisis of 2007-9 (which included what has been referred to by the IMF as 'the deepest post-World War II recession by far'); the UK referendum on continued membership of the European Union; the increasing threat and

⁵³ Gillian Clarke, 'Referendum Reactions', *New Welsh Review*, 38 (1997), 10-11, p. 11.

⁵⁴ Matthew Jarvis, 'Introduction: Wales, Devolution, Poetry', upcoming. Roger Scully and Richard Wyn Jones quotation from *Wales Says Yes*, p. 18.

unfolding consequences of climate change.⁵⁵ All of these events have had, continue to have, and will have a tangible impact upon Welsh writing – especially given the increasingly self-conscious internationalism of much Welsh writing in English of the latter half of the twentieth century – or the Europeanism acknowledged directly by Jan Morris. While by no means an exhaustive list, the first decade and a half of this millennium has clearly witnessed massive political and social upheaval. It is within the context of such global events that devolution has developed in Wales.

So, while devolution should necessarily be viewed as a discourse that began long before 1997 (Morris's writing is clear evidence of this), it is the literature produced since the 1997 referendum, that will be discussed in Part Two of this thesis.

Literary Responses to Devolution

⁵⁵ International Monetary Fund, 'World Economic Outlook - April 2009: Crisis and Recovery', Box 1.1 (pp. 11-14), 24 April 2009 <<http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2009/01/>>

‘Future developments may well lead the recent past to be seen very differently from my take on it but such is the hazard of writing contemporary history’.⁵⁶

Martin Johnes, *Wales Since 1939* (2012)

There are many pitfalls of attempting to draw conclusions from an event that continues to unfold; in this case, devolution in Wales. This section will draw upon the work of contemporary historians and political scientists in Wales and beyond, and will attempt to present (as far as possible) a comprehensive analysis of recent Welsh referendum results (on both devolution and the EU). It will also necessarily draw upon analysis from experts in these fields, although literary analysis will form the backbone of the central arguments. However, in order to present a discussion of Anglophone Welsh literature since devolution, there is necessarily some groundwork to do in order to clarify exactly which aspects of devolution have impacted directly upon literature. In this sense, devolution is not simply a historical event (or a political process), but a context for the reassessment of preconceived notions of Welsh spaces. The statistics and patterns produced following the referendum were reflective of such preconceptions (this will be discussed in more detail in chapter six). However, literature can in effect constitute a deeper, three-dimensional kind of map, one that has the potential to challenge and subvert these preconceptions. The commanding overview of political analysis might thus be met with street level, psychogeographical resistance. By discussing a cross-section of Anglophone Welsh writing that has been published since the 1997 referendum (post-devolution literature), one can see the contrasting literary responses to the issues raised by devolution in Wales. The term post-

⁵⁶ Martin Johnes, *Wales Since 1939* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2012), p. 3. See also: Johnes, ‘On Writing Contemporary History’, *North American Journal of Welsh Studies*, 6:1 (2011), pp. 20-31.

devolution is not employed in order to imply that all of the literature discussed has been consciously shaped by devolution, or that such literature would not exist without it. Rather, that the major political event of devolution was the result of a massive shift in attitudes of the Welsh electorate, particularly, as Osmond points out, in traditionally less Welsh identifying (and largely English-speaking) communities. The *process* of devolution (the gradual devolution of powers to the Welsh Assembly Government from Westminster, rather than simply the establishment of the Assembly), highlights questions of sovereignty in Wales (as well as Scotland and Northern Ireland). Additionally, the political and cultural responses to colonialism and the British Empire noticeable in both Morris and Sinclair's writing throughout the twentieth century are also significant, as are the intervening years between the 1979 and 1997 devolution referendums (as can be seen in Sinclair's treatment of the Miners' strike). The relationship between England and Wales in the aftermath of the EU referendum (in which they were the only two UK nations to return a 'Leave' majority), may yet undergo some change, but both were arguably united with each other by the vote to leave (both returned similar majorities).⁵⁷

However, attending only to the effects of devolution upon literature would denigrate the impact that the literature itself has had upon Wales and Welsh spaces, while also silencing the literary text, or the literariness of the text. It is unlikely that devolution is the reason that the writers discussed herein decide to write, and consequently it would be inaccurate to imply that devolution has had a homogenising effect on literature in Wales, especially given that the post-devolution period has coincided with an increase in the diversity of writing in

⁵⁷ In contrast, Scotland and Northern Ireland were united in their vote to Remain.

Wales.⁵⁸ Structural changes to the Welsh publishing industry notwithstanding, this discussion would be selective in the extreme if it were to suggest that there is a political consensus amongst contemporary Welsh writers in either language. With this in mind, there are several ways of approaching such an issue critically. Having discussed the response of contemporary historians and political scientists to devolution, both prior to and following the 1997 referendum, this chapter will now briefly assess the literary critical response to devolution in Wales. Establishing this context will enable a critical discussion of the dialogic relationship between literary and geopolitical space.

In the two decades since the referendum in 1997, there have been several valuable approaches to analysing the way in which devolution has shaped literature in Wales. Focusing on women's writing, Katie Gramich has suggested that there is a discernible change in women's writing in Wales since devolution, while M. Wynn Thomas and Jane Aaron have suggested that there was a demonstrable increase in the interest of non-Welsh publishers in the work of Welsh writers (as seen in relation to Iain Sinclair in chapter three).⁵⁹ Recently, Neal Alexander has centred the discussion upon the way in which 'poetry from Wales and Northern Ireland is shaped, consciously or unconsciously, by its respective post-devolution contexts'.⁶⁰ Matthew Jarvis, in the introduction to the volume in which Alexander's essay appears, urges that any perceptible change in Welsh writing since

⁵⁸ See Katie Gramich's assessment in *Twentieth-Century Women's Writing in Wales: Land, Gender, Belonging* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007).

⁵⁹ See for example Katie Gramich, *Twentieth-Century Women's Writing in Wales: Land, Gender, Belonging*, Emma Schofield, "'Poor Old Mixed up Wales': Rewriting Regional and National Identity in Post-Devolution Wales', in *Mapping the Self: Place, Identity, Nationality* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), pp. 90-106.

⁶⁰ Neal Alexander, 'Here and there: Poetry after devolution in Wales and Northern Ireland'.

devolution should not be decontextualised from the sheer complexity of reactions within the Welsh electorate. Jarvis writes:

Wales's devolutionary journey has been far from straight-forward (typified perhaps most obviously by the highly complex initial devolutionary settlement, and the subsequent all-too-easily-confusing shifts in constitutional arrangements), and it has generated far from straightforward cultural reactions and positions.⁶¹

It is worth reemphasising, as Jarvis does, that the process (and progress) of devolution since the referendum in 1997 has been complex, and that it has had a multifaceted constitutional impact on the UK. As such, reactions to devolution, whether in literature or those reflected in polling data, are anything but straightforward. The declining level of public engagement with devolution (evidenced by the low turnout in 2011), combined with the increasing complexity of the process of devolution, is reflected in an increasingly diverse response to devolution in Welsh writing. Where initial reactions posited an identifiable reaction in Welsh literature following the referendum, the work of Jarvis and Scully is more sceptical about causal links between devolution and the emergence of a newly confident Welsh writing.

Contributing to this scepticism is the increasingly diverse way in which Welshness might be expressed in literature. John Osmond has argued, '[t]here are, in fact, many different *Welshnesses*, for most symbolised by the language and the differences between the regions of Wales, rather than any uniting civic sense of *Welshness* as such.'⁶² It is a point previously

⁶¹ Matthew Jarvis, 'Introduction: Wales, Devolution, Poetry'.

⁶² John Osmond, 'Welsh Civil Identity in the Twenty-First Century', p. 72.

argued, with a greater degree of specificity, by Osmond in his increasingly pertinent volume, *Welsh Europeans*: ‘One confusion that arises is that there are as many Welshnesses as there are communities in Wales.’⁶³ Osmond’s contention is emphasised by Francesca Rhydderch, who suggests that ‘[n]otions of Welshness are not quite as fixed and immutable as it might be politically expedient for us to imagine them now’.⁶⁴ Yet, as suggested above the creation of the Assembly did have a tangible effect on the cultural output of Wales and some of its writers, independent of their self-identification with a notional national identity or nationhood. Thus, while there are indeed many Welshnesses, in a post-devolution context Welshness might be viewed in tandem with a new populist form of cultural nationalism (more palatable, perhaps, than Morris’s ethnic nationalist arguments). Conversely, Alice Entwistle casts doubt on whether notions of Welshness should have any particular relevance to a discussion of literature in Wales. In her provisional response to the question ‘do authors and places, like the communities they treat, produce texts and their readings, or vice versa?’, Entwistle argues that ‘*Welshness* has long seemed to me to be more tangential to this enquiry than, to echo Jeremy Hooker [...] “the different ways certain writers form ideas or shape *visions* of Wales in their work”’.⁶⁵ Entwistle rightly identifies a flaw in approaching Welsh writing from a strictly nationalist (and localist) perspective, namely ascribing too much importance to the ‘Welshness’ of a writer or their work.

⁶³ John Osmond, *Welsh Europeans*, p. 17.

⁶⁴ Rhydderch, foreword to *Cardiff Central: Ten Writers Return to the Welsh Capital* (Llandysul: Gomer, 2003), p. ix.

⁶⁵ Alice Entwistle, *Poetry, Geography, Gender: Women Rewriting Contemporary Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013), p. 2. Jeremy Hooker quotation, with Entwistle’s emphasis, quoted from *Imagining Wales: A View of Modern Welsh Writing in English* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001), p. 2.

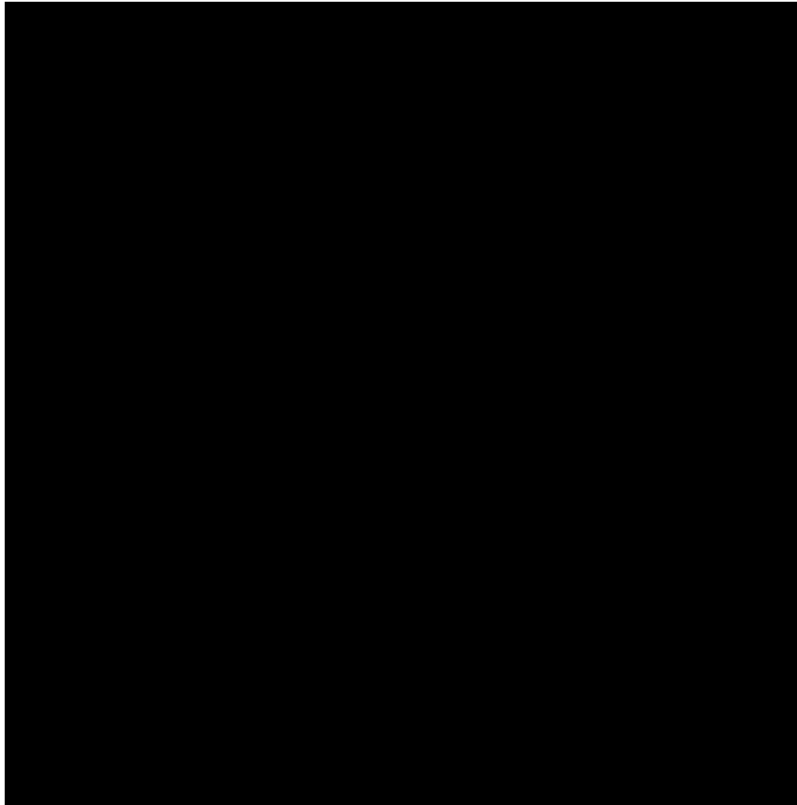
So, in discussing how literature in Wales is 'shaped, consciously or unconsciously, by its respective post-devolution contexts', as Alexander suggests, we might specify that post-devolution 'visions' of Welsh geographies form an integral part of this context. As Robert T. Tally suggests, the 'interplay' of meanings generated by reading literature and the social space in which it operates 'establishes a constellation in which the various data of lived experience are mapped onto a greater plane of significance.'⁶⁶ As such, the analysis in the following chapters will emphasise writing as a spatial practice that is in dialogue with social space, rather than suggesting that devolution is the cause and post-devolution literature is the effect. As Tally argues, '[Literary geography] means paying attention to the changing spatial or geographical formations that affect literary and cultural productions'.⁶⁷ Understanding devolved geographies, spaces that have been redefined, reimagined, built and rebuilt since devolution, is crucial to a discussion of contemporary Welsh literature.

⁶⁶ Robert T. Tally, *Spatiality* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 99.

⁶⁷ *Spatiality*, p. 80.

Chapter Five: Seren's *New Stories from the Mabinogion*

The Myth is Not the Territory: Funding Landscapes



'Place Names in the Mabinogi', in John K. Bollard, *The Mabinogi: Legend and Landscape of Wales*

In Part One, this thesis discussed the way in which one can read devolutionary thought into both fictional and non-fictional Anglophone Welsh writing. In the work of Jan Morris, there was a clear attempt to define a particular kind of Welshness/Cymreictod that emphasised a common political cause and a mono-cultural (linguistic) base of Welsh nationhood. In creating visions of an independent Wales, as well as a Wales reimagined in Y Wladfa, Patagonia, Morris's writing recycles the cultural tropes of mid-twentieth century Welsh nationalist politics. It is in Iain Sinclair's adaptation of elements of the *Mabinogion* in his

novel *Downriver* that a more dissident politics emerges, one that reinterprets figures from Welsh mythology in contemporary London in the context of a response to the neoliberal politics of Margaret Thatcher (and Sinclair's clear discomfort with the deindustrialisation of the South Wales valleys in which he grew up).

Seren's *New Stories from the Mabinogion* assert and contest contemporary Welsh spaces in the aftermath of devolution. They are a series of texts written by Welsh or Wales-associated writers, most of whom have come to prominence since the early part of the twenty-first century. The series' stylised reworking of the *Mabinogion* is a varied and distinctly contemporary one, and its alternative versions of the stories take place significantly after the medieval and pre-medieval settings of the original tales. The series not only updates the historical settings of the *Mabinogion*, but also its spaces and locations (echoing the liberties taken by Sinclair in his use of characters from the tales in London). This chapter will begin with a discussion of the series' aesthetics and its marketing, its relationship to wider networks and trends of mythological 'reimaginings' in contemporary British literature, and the devolved funding system that enabled its publication. This will be followed by a discussion of twentieth-century interpretations of the *Mabinogion*, and a close reading of the series' interpretations of the *Mabinogion's* textual and physical geography.¹

Retelling Myths in Post-Devolution Britain

¹ The pervasive connection of the *Mabinogion* to particular Welsh geographies can be seen in the literary tourism map in the introduction provides, which advertises a tour of the *Mabinogion* in Pembrokeshire with Sioned Davies.

The most significant British contemporary to Seren's *New Stories* series is Canongate's *Myth* series, to which the most recent additions are a translation of *The Song of King Gesar* by Alai, A.S. Byatt's *Ragnarok*, and Philip Pullman's *The Good Man Jesus and the Scoundrel Christ*.² Gwyneth Lewis, writing in her contribution to Seren's series, acknowledges at least a partial influence of Canongate's series on her own work, writing in *The Meat Tree* that she 'owe[s] a debt of gratitude to David Grossman's retelling of the Samson myth, *Lion's Honey* (Canongate, 2007)'.³ Aesthetically, the two series are presented very differently to one another. The *New Stories*, unlike Canongate's *Myth* series, are unified by their visually striking cover art, each of which features the silhouette of a tree (signifying the 'branches' of the original tales), alongside a token identifiable object or character associated with each particular tale. The *New Stories*' cover art, in its use of the extended visual metaphor of the stories as 'branches' (including the adaptations of stories not connected to the four branches), metaphorically embeds the concept of the cultural rootedness of the *Mabinogion*. The cover art has the effect of flattening the original tales, and suggests that they are a unified whole. The tree on each cover gives the impression that all the tales included in the *New Stories* are branches of the *Mabinogion*, connected in way that they are clearly not.

In contrast to the *New Stories*' presentation, the most notorious example from Canongate's series, Philip Pullman's *The Good Man Jesus and the Scoundrel Christ*, bears no obvious

² Alai, *The Song of King Gesar* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2013); A.S. Byatt, *Ragnarok* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2011); Philip Pullman, *The Good Man Jesus and the Scoundrel Christ* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2010).

³ Gwyneth Lewis, *The Meat Tree* (Bridgend: Seren, 2010), p. 253.

hallmark of being part of a series in its cover design (other than a small, text-less logo on the back cover, recognisable only to those familiar with the Canongate's series). There is only a single page detailing the *Myth* series' other contributors, where the *New Stories* has an individual page devoted to each of the other contributions to the series.⁴ Whereas the unified cover art of the *New Stories* offers a reader an aesthetic unity – which is not necessarily reflective of the diversity of the individual stories collected within the *Mabinogion* – Canongate's approach emphasises diversity and disparity.⁵ Pullman's novel became notorious for its controversial re-imagining of the New Testament, prompting a response from the then Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams in the *Guardian*.⁶ However, *The Good Man's* relationship to Canongate's series of contemporary interpretations of mythology is rarely mentioned, creating a kind of hierarchy that is not present in Seren's series. So, while there are parallels between Seren's and Canongate's projects, each series has clearly different aspirations.

Following the completion of the *New Stories* in late 2013 (ten volumes covering the original eleven tales) with the volumes by Trezza Azzopardi and Tishani Doshi, the collection is now available in the form of a box set (further emphasising the unified aesthetic of the collection as a whole). The series was published in a succession of five (otherwise unrelated) pairings, beginning in 2009 with Owen Sheers's *White Ravens* and Russell Celyn Jones's *The Ninth*

⁴ Most contributions to Canongate's series feature the logo more prominently on the front cover.

⁵ Gwyn Jones suggests that this 'diversity should not, however, tempt us to overlook a substantial unity – a unity which is imposed both by their subject matter and their social and literary milieu', Everyman *Mabinogion* (1989), p. x.

⁶ Williams, Rowan, 'The Good Man Jesus and the Scoundrel Christ by Philip Pullman' [review], *The Guardian*, 3 April 2010

<<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/apr/03/good-jesus-christ-philip-pullman>>

Wave.⁷ Using only a single collection (the *Mabinogion*), as opposed to Canongate's more pluralistic approach, the authors explore and excavate an icon of Wales's (and, the series contends, Britain's) literary heritage.⁸ However, both Seren's and Canongate's respective marketing material also share some significant similarities. While the *New Stories* series emphasises itself as giving 'leading Welsh authors the chance to retell these medieval stories of Celtic mythology and Arthurian Britain in entirely their own way, creating fresh, contemporary novellas while keeping the old tales at the heart of the new', Canongate's *Myths* series 'brings together some of the world's finest writers, each of whom has retold a myth in a contemporary and memorable way'.⁹ The language utilised by both publishers emphasises contemporaneity, mythology, and retelling. However, while each series contains discrete works by multiple authors, the *New Stories* uses only Welsh (or Wales-associated) writers, reinforcing the perspective of the original *Mabinogion* (which series editor Penny Thomas calls as a representation of 'Britain seen through the eyes of medieval Wales').¹⁰

In the *New Stories*, the change is predominantly temporal (medieval to contemporary), preserving the spatiality of the *Mabinogion* (this is still evidently Britain seen through the

⁷ Sheers, *White Ravens* (Bridgend: Seren, 2009); Jones, *The Ninth Wave* (Bridgend: Seren, 2009).

⁸ In writing this, I acknowledge the problematic nature of referring to the tales of the *Mabinogion* as a single collection, alluded to in Sioned Davies's introduction to her recent translation: 'they were never conceived as an organic group, and are certainly not the work of a single author' (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. ix. However, since Lady Charlotte Guest's English-language translation (published between 1838 and 1845), they have been conceived of, and published as, a collection, and are treated as such in Seren's series.

⁹ This quotation doesn't appear in the series itself, but is taken from the marketing for the series box set on Seren's website: <<https://www.serenbooks.com/productdisplay/new-stories-mabinogion---complete-box-set-unsigned>> *Myths* quotation taken from the inside cover of Philip Pullman's *The Good Man Jesus and the Scoundrel Christ*, unpaginated.

¹⁰ From Penny Thomas' introduction to each volume of the *New Stories from the Mabinogion* (Bridgend: Seren, 2009-2013), p. 10.

eyes of Welsh and Wales-associated authors).¹¹ However, the temporal shift also reinforces a new post-devolution Welsh spatiality; the borders (both internal and external) that define the geography of the original have been redrawn, and its power centres have shifted from the kingdoms of Gwynedd and Dyfed to elected governments in London and, following devolution, Cardiff. Thus, this chapter aims to explore the extent to which ‘contemporary’ in this case could also metonymically suggest and incorporate distinctive visions of a ‘devolved’ Wales. Indeed, the series’ collective title, *New Stories from the Mabinogion*, suggests a dialogic relationship with the past, *from* which these *new* stories emerge; a titular suggestion of shared national perspective that stands in marked contrast to Canongate’s *Myths* series.

The *New Stories* series is the most expansive English-language interpretation of the *Mabinogion* since the devolution referendum in 1997, and eschews the ironic psychogeography of the *Real* series (which will be discussed in the following chapter). Crucially the *New Stories* remind a contemporary reader of the deeper embeddedness – not only in Welsh language writing but in Welsh writing in English – of the *Mabinogion*. The mythological, temporally ruptured lineage of the original – fragments of some of its stories exist in several manuscripts spanning centuries – is exemplified in the dream sequences of ‘The Dream of Emperor Maxen’ and ‘Rhonabwy’s Dream’. They are a collection of texts, that, in the absence of a unifying historical context or perspective, emphasise locality and geography. The process of naming is of such importance to the tales that a defining trait of many of the original stories is, according to Gwyn Jones’s introduction to the seminal Everyman translation in 1949, ‘the so-called onomastic tale, the fanciful explanation of the

¹¹ Ibid, p. 10.

name of a place or person'.¹² In a contemporary (devolved) context, the change in Wales's (and Britain's) geographical make-up remains heavily, albeit less-violently, politicised. Aside from its influence on Celtic mythology and, in the case of its 'Romances', Arthurian literature, the specificity of place in the *Mabinogion*, and the exactness of the journeys undertaken by many of its central characters, provides the authors of the *New Stories* with a rich geographical data field. Recalling Marc Brosseau's problematisation of the 'will to transform fictional literature into a reservoir of positive geographical data', and its potential to 'silence [...] the literary text as a text', we should be careful not to assume any positivist notions of the ability of literature to transcribe objective data, or for us as readers to extract such data from it without any unintentional transference. However, the *Mabinogion* occupies an extraordinary space in British literature; a more important textual map of Medieval Wales – in this case a map that views Wales through the prism of its oral literary heritage – would be hard to find.¹³ The etymology of Welsh place names in the *Mabinogion* is often elaborate. But while the myth, like the map, is not the territory, the stories and characters from the *Mabinogion* pervade in contemporary real and imagined Welsh geographies.

While naming is of great significance to the *Mabinogion*, representations of Wales's mythological topography have gradually attained particular importance. Gwyn and Mair Jones, in their post-introductory note to the 1989 reissue of the Everyman edition, praise

¹² *The Mabinogion: Revised Edition*, trans. Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones (London: Everyman's Library, 1989), p. xviii. See also, John K. Bollard's extensive discussion of place names throughout *The Mabinogi: Legend and Landscape of Wales* (Llandysul: Gomer, 2006).

¹³ It should be noted, however, that the textual map created by the *New Stories* is an Anglophone one, a factor that alters an understanding the onomastics of the medieval Welsh-language original.

the ‘helpful additions’ of two maps prepared by Harold Carter, whose contributions were said to ensure ‘the continued well-being of our, and their, and Everyman’s *Mabinogion*’.¹⁴ The ‘continued well-being’ of the *Mabinogion* is said to be dependent not only on the preservation of its literary content, but also of its geography (which the *New Stories* often transpose, misshape, and subvert). The *New Stories* represent a deeply layered Welsh geography, one that is mostly faithful to the *compass* of the original. Journeys between London and Wales often remain, but other journeys, for example Emperor Maxen’s journey from Rome to Wales, are reinterpreted without the use of the specific locations of the original (providing a contemporary retelling of the Roman occupation of Wales that is true to the spirit of the original, if not its geography). Even where the original geographical features remain, such as in Owen Sheers’s *White Ravens*, the journey from London, through Wales, to Ireland is a very different one to that undertaken by Matholwch (King of Ireland, Second Branch), in the original.¹⁵ Thus, it is not so much the general reimagining taking place in the *New Stories* that is of interest to this piece, but rather the ways in which the stories are remapped onto devolved Welsh territories. In doing so this chapter seeks to extend its focus on the significance of remapping in the context of devolution, and question whether the *New Stories* are stylistically emblematic of a literary resistance similar to that displayed by Iain Sinclair.

There is, I would suggest, a broader post-devolutionary importance to the way in which Welsh and British geography is transcribed in the *New Stories*, perhaps especially so given that the stories do not reproduce the maps that have become a staple of twentieth-century

¹⁴ Gwyn and Mair Jones, *The Mabinogion; Revised Edition*, p. xli.

¹⁵ Sheers, *White Ravens*.

Mabinogion translations (such as the map featured at the beginning of this chapter).¹⁶ In place of such maps, the *New Stories* remap the *Mabinogion* and contemporary Wales in two important ways. First, the remapping of Welsh mythology resonates particularly vividly in the climate of post-devolution Wales (which is especially in evidence in the *Real* series' deep/counter-mapping project), and results in texts that interrogate both historical and contemporary Welsh spaces. Second, and rather more difficult to define specifically, is the potential influence of literature and its role in nation-building (recalling Gillian Clarke's call for the 'artists' to 'build [the Welsh nation] it in the imaginations of the people'). The readings below will thus necessitate a look at the political context of a devolved Wales in conjunction with the texts' literary content.

Recent Work on the *Mabinogion* and Landscape

John Updike argues that the way in which a medieval text is navigated is fundamentally different to the way in which a contemporary reader might navigate a text.

What freight did such a caravan of marvels carry for its auditors? They inhabited a world where the naming of places was still in progress; psychology had not yet replaced geography as an orienting science. What we are, is, to an extent, *where* we

¹⁶ Recent editions of the Everyman translation publish variations of a similar map, usually titled 'The Wales of the Mabinogion'. Occasionally, more specific maps are produced, such as 'Taith Y Twrch Trwyth', in Rachel Bromwich and D. Simon Evans, *Culhwch and Olwen: An Edition and Study of the Oldest Arthurian Tale* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1992). I would suggest that there is also an echo here of the *Real* series and its avoidance of the over-use of maps.

are, and what links of loyalty, to political entities embodied in kings and chieftains, hold us in place. In a world without technological change, history is genealogy.¹⁷

According to Updike, the 'orienting science' of geography has now been replaced and obscured by psychology. The implication is that the geographical work that medieval texts conduct is more authentic. Initially, we might temporarily set aside Updike's separation between the disciplines of psychology and geography that either render or are rendered unstable by the kind of psychogeographical writing approach adopted by writers such as Arthur Machen and Iain Sinclair. In the case of the *Mabinogion*, Updike certainly has a point; the tales rarely describe feelings and motivations of characters, and instead depict a series of logical and illogical actions, with relatively little sense (or explanation) of causality. The difficulty in understanding the motivations of the characters in the original tales has led to more extreme positions in recent scholarship, such as Alfred K. Siewers, who suggests that it is a result of the failure of scholarship to recognise that the 'Welsh landscape itself' is the 'primary character', which 'seek[s] to integrate imaginative art and physical reality'.¹⁸ The geographical framework of the *Mabinogion*, its textual map, is crucial to a reader's understanding of its logic; much of the 'what?' is deduced from its 'where'. In a similar way to some of its contemporaries, such as 'Gawain and the Green Knight', even the supernatural realms of the *Mabinogion* are located within an identifiable Welsh topography that can be, and has been mapped.¹⁹ Gillian Rudd argues that '[t]here is a natural geography

¹⁷ John Updike, preface to the Everyman *Mabinogion*, trans. Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000), p. xi.

¹⁸ Alfred K. Siewers, 'Writing an Icon of the Land: the *Mabinogi* as a Mystagogy of Landscape', *Peritia*, 19 (2005), 193-228, pp. 194-5.

¹⁹ The *New Stories* contributors can thus cast their intertextual net even wider than the original authors of the *Mabinogion*.

that defies human definition and control, and in one way that is the real landscape, but even that [...] is made up at least in part by our human reactions and imaginings'.²⁰ Contemporary myth-making in a devolved Wales, such as the *New Stories*, is thus an explicit negotiation of the *real* and *imagined* place, in which the *real* geography of the Wales is crucial to the re-contextualisation of the myth to a contemporary geopolitical situation.

In a sense, this chapter seeks to question the significance of recycling the myths of the *Mabinogion* into a contemporary setting. Siewers argues that the original four branches of the *Mabinogion* were 'a fully loaded iconographic act of cultural resistance [...] aimed squarely against the modernising Western tendency (seen in even the later middle ages) to reform nature into a more interiorised space of "virtual reality"'.²¹ Joseph McMullen suggests that 'the kind of overlay landscape the author of *Breuddwyd Maxen Wledig* is dealing with [are] places fraught with meaning because of continual occupation and re-occupation'.²² We might begin to question how the original tales' treatment of 'cultural resistance' towards occupation reasserts itself in post-devolution Wales. Recent analysis of the *Mabinogion*, at least that which focuses on the four branches, has centred around an emphasis on the geographical work of the original tales that documents a Wales whose borders and sovereign status were markedly different to contemporary Wales. The individual tales of the four branches, Siewers contends, 'can be read as a topographic

²⁰ Gillian Rudd, 'The Wilderness of Wirral' in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Arthuriana* 23.1 (2013), pp. 52-65, 62.

²¹ Alfred K. Siewers, 'Writing an Icon of the Land: the *Mabinogi* as a Mystagogy of Landscape, p. 228. Siewers' article focuses exclusively on the four branches.

²² McMullen, 'Three Major Forts to be Built for Her: Rewriting History through the Landscape in *Breuddwyd Maxen Wledig*', *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, 31 (2011), p. 237.

synecdoche for Celtic culture'.²³ But the overt emphasis of the *New Stories* is in somehow making the imaginary world of the *Mabinogion* more contemporary, and in a sense, more real. Where psychogeographical writing often insert the subjective, even imaginary, experience into the real, and insists upon the plurality of place, the *New Stories* invert the process and weave the real into the imaginary: a form of textual resistance with significant parallels to Siewers' 'fully loaded resistance'. This resistance in the *New Stories* might be thought of as a contemporary reaction to rigid definitions of Celticity, discussed by David Harvey et al.:

Though traditional territorial or linguistic interpretations of Celticity are still important, they are being supplemented by alternative versions of Celticity, ones that are characterised by notions of hybridity and contestation. In a post-modern world, the (perceived) old and secure Celtic categories of the past are being reworked in novel and interesting ways. This does not mean that the conventional Celtic category is devoid of meaning in the contemporary world; rather, it means that it is being complemented by other, often less place-specific and more hybrid interpretations of Celticity.²⁴

In rewriting the *Mabinogion*, the *New Stories* provide a challenge to 'secure Celtic categories'. The *New Stories* relocate the tales in both newly devolved and internationalist geographies. The new myths are 'less place-specific', and thus signify a broader attempt to internationalise the *Mabinogion* in the context of devolution.

²³ Siewers, 'Writing an Icon of the Land', p. 196.

²⁴ David Harvey, Rhys Jones, Neil McNroy, and Christine Milligan, 'Timing and Spacing Celtic Geographies', in *Celtic Geographies: Old Culture, New Times*, 1-18. p.3.

Fflur Dafydd, author of *The White Trail*, a contemporary retelling of the ‘Culhwch and Olwen’ myth, suggests that the series is an assertively post-devolution project.²⁵

[*The White Trail*] is an English-language reimagining of one of the tales of the medieval Welsh manuscript, The Mabinogion. Such a commission seems to me to signal what devolution is all about – building upon the richness of our heritage in order to assert our difference, adapting and appropriating what we have and making it relevant and forward-looking, rather than becoming homogenised [...].²⁶

There are several important observations to be made here. First, that the series is an English-language retelling of a Welsh-language original, one that Dafydd (a Welsh speaker) experienced in its original form (where most of the other contributors used Sioned Davies’s translation as their source text). Second, that this is a commissioned series, one that is evidently part of a concerted effort to expand the reach of the *Mabinogion* to a modern audience. Third, in asserting the relevance of the *Mabinogion* to a contemporary audience, the series is a resistance against the effects of cultural homogenisation and Anglicisation. Dafydd identifies devolution as an opportunity to directly resist this process of cultural homogenisation, and acknowledges the direct impact that devolution has had on her writing, specifically on her imperative to write in English. She writes: ‘devolution has impacted greatly on my work, as much on the mode of expression as on the content [...] [It]

²⁵ *The White Trail* (Bridgend: Seren, 2011).

²⁶ Fflur Dafydd, ‘Expert View: Time to Leave the Hermitage’, *The Guardian*, 10 October 2011 <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/oct/10/devolution-welsh-ready-to-fly>>

has heralded a new confidence in bilingualism'.²⁷ So, Dafydd, more so than any other author in the series, explicitly states the importance of devolution to her retelling of the original myth.

The Contemporary Welsh Funding Landscape

John K. Bollard argues that, in addition to 'the geographical landscape of Wales', we must consider the

literary landscape of Wales, the array of tales, texts, and manuscripts amongst which *The Mabinogi* is situated and which inevitably colours and informs our perception of its meaning and function. We must also consider the tumultuous historical, political and social landscape of eleventh- to fourteenth-century Wales, and conditions that undoubtedly had much to do with why *The Mabinogi* was composed and ultimately preserved in manuscript.²⁸

The political context of the *Mabinogion* is inseparable from the context in which it was produced, and both Bollard (and Siewers) make strong arguments for the consideration of geopolitical context in analysing the four branches. One significant question this raises in relation to the *New Stories* is whether elements of the preoccupations of the original authors and redactors are transferred along with the myth that is being retold. While Bollard and Siewers both focus exclusively on the relative unity in the four branches, it is the

²⁷ Fflur Dafydd, 'Expert View'.

²⁸ John K. Bollard, 'Landscapes of the *Mabinogi*', *Landscapes*, 2 (2009), pp. 37-60, 40.

disunity of the translation and erroneous construction of the *Mabinogion* in Lady Charlotte Guest's version that creates a new set of issues for the *New Stories*. It is an attempt to create a cohesive series of stories from eleven tales that emerged out of several markedly different historical contexts.²⁹ While the geography of the four branches might be easier to interpret, the survival of the text as it was produced and came into circulation provides several possibilities for a literary geographical analysis that takes into account not only the text's original production and dissemination, but also the way in which it has continually been retranslated, and the geopolitical circumstances of its telling and retelling. The concern of this chapter is to explore to what extent the eleven tales transfer the geopolitical situations of the original texts (that were essential to both the production and understanding of them), into a contemporary, devolved Welsh context.

The fact that the *New Stories* series was commissioned and produced in post-devolution Wales raises some significant questions about the scope and importance of literary reimaginings both in and of Wales, the rewriting of myth and its relation to other similar literary projects of the twenty-first century (such as Canongate's *Myth* series), as well as the structure of a grant-aided literature and its implications. Seren, the series' publisher, was a recipient of a Welsh Books Council 'Advances/ Fees to Authors and Illustrators' Grant (also received by some of the *Real* series authors), which includes the following aims in its guidance for applicants:³⁰

²⁹ Many translations of the *Mabinogion* retain Guest's title *The Mabinogion* (with the exception of Bollard, who uses the grammatically more correct term *Mabinogi*). Glyn Jones refers to the error as 'a scribal error of a common enough kind', Everyman *Mabinogion* (1989), pp. ix-x.

³⁰ It is important to note here that the 'applicants' are the publishers, not individual authors.

[...] to help publishers commission or bid for titles which have the potential to generate substantial sales income.

[...] to demonstrate the good sales potential of the proposed book by drawing on evidence of past sales of similar titles or titles by the same author.³¹

According to the Welsh Books Council's Annual Report, the Author Advance scheme 'allows Welsh publishers to offer more competitive advances to attract leading authors and figures that will draw a large readership'.³² Thus the funding received by Seren for advances for the *New Stories* authors is in contrast to the majority of projects funded by the Welsh Books Council, whose website states that:

In general, publishing grants are made towards expected deficits. [...] However, a number of schemes are now targeted at more popular publishing projects, the profits of which will be re-invested in publishing Welsh Books in English. See, in particular, the Advances/Fees to Authors and Illustrators scheme [and] the Marketing Grants scheme for English-language books.³³

Hence the funding allocated to Seren for the publication of the *New Stories* series is based on the projected profitability of the series. By definition, the 'Author Advance' scheme does not seek to promote new, or previously unpublished authors, but to draw on the success of established authors who usually publish outside of Wales. Any profits from these books are

³¹ Quoted from the Welsh Books Council's document entitled: 'English-Language Publishing Grants Guidelines: Advances/Fees for Authors and Illustrators' (2010), p. 5.
<<http://www.clc.org.uk/grant/1220/guidelines>>

³² Welsh Books Council, *Annual Report 2012-13*, p. 23.

³³ Quotation from the Welsh Books Council website <<http://www.clc.org.uk/grant/1220>>

designated to be 're-invested' by the publisher. The advance amount varies between authors, and is anywhere up to £10,000, not including the individual marketing budget for each title. In the *New Stories*, it ranges from £3,500 to £8,500, and amounts to £61,000 over a five year period, excluding additional marketing fees.³⁴ It is not uncommon for publishers to subsidise newer authors with profits from more renowned names, however, in the case of the Welsh Books Council (as a publicly-funded body), the system is unique. While similar criticisms have been levelled at the Arts Council of England (ACE), such as for its unbalanced London-centric approach to arts funding (in which per-head spend remains significantly higher in London than elsewhere in the UK), the ACE does not have an equivalent funding mechanism to the Welsh Books Council's Author Advance scheme.³⁵ It should be noted that in the context of the overall funding landscape, £61,000 over a five-year period is relatively small when compared with the total English-Language Grant Expenditure (averaging £750,269 since 2009). Over the five years of the series' publication (ten publications between 2009 and 2013), Author Advances for the *New Stories* amounted to a yearly

³⁴ These figures were obtained both in correspondence and through meetings with the Welsh Books Council. The figure for the Advance Grants including Marketing Grants is £81,700. I have separated the Marketing Grant from all the statistics discussed so far. Also, these figures are for Advances only, so do not take into account the production/printing costs of the series.

³⁵ See Sheila McGregor, 'The London bias of arts funding, again', *The Guardian*, 31 October 2013 <<http://www.theguardian.com/culture-professionals-network/culture-professionals-blog/2013/oct/31/london-bias-arts-funding-report>> It should be noted that per-capita spending comparisons between England and Wales are largely unhelpful. A recent report placed the per-capita spend in Wales at £9.42, and that of England at £3.17. However, due to large disparities in population density and distribution, the report states, 'it is difficult to make meaningful comparisons between expenditure in Wales and England.' See: Arts Council of Wales, 'Wales Local Authority Arts Investment and Partnerships Survey 2012/13', available here: <<http://www.arts.wales/what-we-do/research/annual-surveys/local-authority-arts-expenditure-survey>>

average of 1.6% of this total (£12,200), as well as a further 0.6% in marketing costs.³⁶ Perhaps more pertinently, the *New Stories*' allocation amounts to a yearly average of 24% of the total money allocated in the Author Advance scheme. Furthermore, the *New Stories* allocation of the Author Advance budget has declined steadily between 2009 (37%) and 2012 (13%), but rose in the final year to 23% in 2013. So, while the Author Advance scheme is certainly a minority venture within the larger apparatus of the Welsh Books Council's funding for English-Language publications, the *New Stories* occupied a significant place within between 2009 and 2013. In this context then, one might deduce that the series has received significant financial support from a scheme that is incompatible with the Welsh Books Council's usual funding system, but that this support has declined somewhat over subsequent publications in the series.³⁷ I would argue that – remembering Thacker's argument that 'Literary texts represent social spaces, but social space shapes literary forms' – the way in which the series is produced is itself emblematic of post-devolution Wales. The spaces represented are devolved spaces, and some even make explicit reference to this. The funding landscape that enables the series' production is deeply imbued with the geopolitical narrative of devolution. In this way the process of rewriting the series might also reflect similar concerns to those that preoccupied the original writers and 'redactors', which Siewers contends reflect a 'probable desire to construct an identification of lore from a re-

³⁶ The figures quoted are my own calculations, based on figures available in the Welsh Books Council's Annual Reports for the periods cited, and have been rounded to the nearest single decimal point. Specific information regarding the individual grants awarded to Seren for the *New Stories* was provided directly by the WBC, and gratefully received, for the purposes of this research.

³⁷ In the absence of sales figures for the series, the reason for this is difficult to determine.

imagined larger (lost) Celtic Britain within the smaller bounds of what was becoming known as Wales'.³⁸

The concept of authorship in the *Mabinogion* is particularly problematic, as Sioned Davies writes in the introduction to her translation:

[N]one of the tales is attributed to an identified author, suggesting that there was no sense of 'ownership' as such, and that the texts were viewed as part of a collective memory. Indeed, on several occasions the final redactors (which may perhaps be a more correct term than 'authors' in many cases) draw attention to their sources, a common feature of medieval literature, but in so doing they distance themselves from those sources and set themselves up as merely the mouthpiece of tradition.³⁹

The commissioned authors represent a commercial value (as discussed on the section on the funding for their advances). While Davies's description of a 'collective memory' could readily be applied to readers familiar with the *Mabinogion*, the *New Stories* place an emphasis on authorship, rather than redaction, highlighting the perspective of those who translate and rework its stories. The *New Stories'* positionality also places a renewed

³⁸ Siewers, 'Writing an Icon of the Land', pp. 195-6.

³⁹ Sioned Davies, *The Mabinogion*, trans. Sioned Davies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007 p. xiii. This is the translation which is largely acknowledged as the source text for the writers in the *New Stories*.

emphasis on the authors themselves, a fact made more significant given the anonymity of the authors of the original tales.⁴⁰

The *Mabinogion* in the Twentieth Century

There is some divergence in twentieth- and twenty-first-century responses to, and interpretation of, the *Mabinogion*. Sioned Davies, in the introduction to the 2007 translation of the original texts, suggests that:

Traditionally, the tales of ‘Peredur son of Efrog’, ‘Geraint son of Erbin’, and ‘The Lady of the Well’ have been known as ‘the three romances’. [However] although they exhibit some of the broad characteristics of romance, such as concerns regarding chivalric modes of behaviour and knightly virtues, they do not lie comfortably within that genre [...] [W]hile they may well be very loose retellings of Chrétien’s poems, they have been completely adapted to the native culture, and remain stylistically and structurally within the Welsh narrative tradition.⁴¹

Emphasising the uniqueness of its literary style, rather than its geography, Davies suggests that the preservation of certain aspects of Chrétien’s original stories (‘the education of the knight, and moderation between love and military prowess’), and the rejection of others,

⁴⁰ I refer here to Angharad Saunders’s use of the term ‘positionality’ to encompass the ‘the relative powers, motivations and levels of engagement different readers and writers have and the geographies these belie’.

⁴¹ Sioned Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. xi.

culminates in 'hybrid texts, typical of a post-colonial world'.⁴² Some of original tales themselves were thus already 'retellings' that resituated contemporary European mythology in a distinctly Welsh context/geography. The *New Stories*' retellings of the *Mabinogion* have to contend with some significant changes to the geographical and political make-up of Britain. The original stories were composed (rather than written, they were part of an oral tradition) at a time when, in the words of Penny Thomas' introduction included in each volume in the series, 'Welsh was once spoken as far north as Edinburgh'.⁴³ Thomas adds that:

The *Mabinogion* brings us Celtic mythology, Arthurian romance, and a history of the Island of Britain seen through the eyes of medieval Wales – but tells tales that stretch way beyond the boundaries of contemporary Wales, just as the Welsh part of this island once did.⁴⁴

Again the combination of spatial metaphors and temporal change is present. Thomas suggests that the *original* stories' geographical representation of Wales has altered significantly over time, a view corroborated not only by the shifting of the Wales/England border, but also the redefinition of what used to be referred to as the 'Island of Britain'.⁴⁵

⁴² Sioned Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. xxiv.

⁴³ Each text in the series begins with Penny Thomas's series introduction on page 8.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 8

⁴⁵ A description which occludes Ireland and its importance to the *Mabinogion*.

Afterwords

In the context of devolution, the *New Stories* could be seen as an emerging, confident new literature in which there is an identifiable movement, both physical and metaphorical, beyond the borders of Wales. Consequently, venturing into Medieval Welsh literature is posited as progressive where once it may have been considered conservative. However, the stories themselves are far from conservative. Not only do the *New Stories* frequently relocate the tales, but include scenes of recreational drug-taking (the means by which the protagonists fall into a deep sleep in Niall Griffiths's *The Dreams of Max and Ronnie*) and space travel (the narrative vehicle for the discovery of Blodeuwedd, the woman made of flowers, in Gwyneth Lewis's *The Meat Tree*) that may at first appear unfaithful to the original tales. However, the afterwords in each volume – which themselves are preceded by a brief, 'faithful' synopsis of the source text provided by series editor Penny Thomas – give an indication of the paradoxical nature of retelling the stories. Perhaps more significant is the placement of the original tale's synopsis, which follows the reimagined version (rather than preceding it). While many readers of the *New Stories* will be familiar with the original tales, some will not (the *Mabinogion* is widely taught in schools in Wales, but infrequently, if at all, in the rest of the UK).⁴⁶ The placement of the synopsis *after* the retelling clearly prioritises the contemporary version. Readers who are familiar with the *Mabinogion* will experience the *New Stories* with a knowledge of the original tales, recognising references to

⁴⁶ Also, part of the Welsh Books Council's 'Additional Funding' is allocated to generating publicity in England. The series' major finale event, attended by every author in the series, was held in Somerset House (Strand, London), indicating the publisher's anticipation of a wide readership for the series outside of Wales.

the originals. Unfamiliar readers will read the *New Stories* in a relative state of isolation from any previous interpretation.

While geographical borders in Wales have been redrawn in the centuries since the *Mabinogion* was first written, the original stories do explore other 'bordered' mentalities, particularly linguistic, such as in 'The Dream of Maxen Wledig', in which Welsh women have their tongues cut out by the invading Roman forces. Whereas the spatial separation of the *Real* series into geographically bordered volumes also explores and occasionally reinforces some of these 'unseen' borders (such as the 'Landsker'), the *New Stories* illustrate how borders both seen and unseen have shifted over time. The *Mabinogion* has been redefined and reimagined, modernised and romanticised, elsewhere in popular culture throughout the twentieth century, but as Niall Griffiths laments, it 'is barely read beyond the pales of academia now'.⁴⁷ Inevitably, this leads to omission (which may result in, or be the result of, reinterpretation), modernisation (contrasted with the conservatism or nostalgic romanticisation), and rearrangement (as seen in Owen Sheers's 'splitting' of 'Branwen, Daughter of Lyr' between contemporary London and a Second World War London/Welsh/Irish setting).⁴⁸ Griffiths suggests that a sense of displacement is intrinsic to the series, noting that previous volumes in the series were 'written on land not Welsh'.⁴⁹ While Griffiths interprets this in a semi-ironic, and self-referentially 'quasi-pareidolic' way, there is a sense of a wider narrative of the place the *Mabinogion* holds in contemporary Welsh literature: '[it] follows us', Griffiths continues, 'like luggage' (*Dreams of Max and Ronnie*, p. 155). The contemporary 'jobbing' writer, as Griffiths writes, is required to 'go

⁴⁷ Niall Griffiths, *The Dreams of Max and Ronnie* (Bridgend: Seren, 2010), p. 156.

⁴⁸ Sheers, *White Ravens*.

⁴⁹ *The Dreams of Max and Ronnie*, p. 155.

wherever the job takes [them]', so it is perhaps natural that, due to the commercial commitments of the modern author, the ability to traverse greater distances enables the *New Stories* to expand their narratives beyond the borders within which the original writers and storytellers were (relatively) confined. Griffiths's reference to the 'jobbing writer' also brings an important aspect of the *New Stories* into focus, that is, the position of the professional author, as opposed to the travelling bards who would have preserved and moulded the *Mabinogion* for generations.

The Meat Tree

Gwyneth Lewis, in recognising the inherent difficulty in writing a realistic contemporary retelling of one of the more fantastical tales of the *Mabinogion* (focusing on Blodeuwedd from the Fourth Branch), locates her version on a spaceship in the year 2210 (exactly two hundred years in the future at the point of publication). This temporal and spatial relocation paradoxically removes the story from its Gwynedd location but preserves the otherworldliness of the original, whose most notorious character is the woman made of flowers, Blodeuwedd. This relocation is emblematic of the way in which 'less place-specific' Celticities (Harvey et al) are creating 'novel and interesting' challenges to traditional notions of Celticity. Lewis's text certainly offers an alternative Celticity. Lewis chooses to refocus the narrative away from Blodeuwedd and onto two new characters, who share the narration of the story. The de-centring of the story's most notorious character destabilises not only the original narrative on which Lewis's story is based, but also 'remaps' the text by presenting a reader with not only a new topography, but also a new narrative space and perspective. The ship's two crew members, the 'Inspector of Wrecks', known as Campion, and his

‘Apprentice’ Nona (also referred to as ‘He’ and ‘She’ in some sections), are in the process of inspecting a twentieth-century shipwreck when they discover and enter into a virtual reality machine, in order to find out what happened to the previous crew. Upon entering into the machine’s programme, they find themselves not only within the Blodeuwedd story, but also assuming the roles of its characters. This metafictional device allows Lewis’s central characters to ‘read’ the original tale which, importantly, is mostly unaltered, and also to comment on it through their ‘Joint Thought Channel’ and ‘Synapse Log[s]’.⁵⁰ The ‘Joint Thought Channel’, a means by which the Inspector and his Apprentice can communicate silently while in the virtual reality machine, provides a narrative device through which the action of the original story can be communicated. The narrative device echoes the framing of the original tale, in which Gwydion tells Pryderi: ‘I would be happy to tell a story’ (*The Mabinogion*, trans. Sioned Davies, p. 48). Following this, the narrator declares:

Gwydion is the best storyteller in the world. And that night he entertained the court with amusing anecdotes and stories, until he was admired by everyone in the court, and Pryderi enjoyed conversing with him. (*The Mabinogion*, trans. Sioned Davies, p. 48)

Utilising the ship’s crew as readers who encounter the text on behalf of the reader enables Lewis to choose when and where to deploy the original story. A focus on interpreting the Blodeuwedd myth in the twenty-first century is thus prioritised over the original narrative itself, exemplified in a short exchange about the anachronism of Math’s (the king’s) feet needing to be placed in the lap of a virgin:

⁵⁰ *The Meat Tree*, pp. 15-17.

Inspector of Wrecks

It's something to do with matriarchy, that the king is at the mercy of female sexuality. When I was a teenager, I read quite a bit of Robert Graves.

Apprentice

Who?

Inspector of Wrecks

Poet and mythologist. He wrote about the Goddess, who was deposed by patriarchal religion.

[...]

Apprentice

But you could just as easily read this differently. That the king is radically divorced from his land. (*Meat Tree*, pp. 42-3)

This exchange, in which the two crew members disagree over the significance of the king's 'strange arrangement' (*Meat Tree*, p. 41), posits Graves' historical argument from *The White Goddess*, with its overtly sexual implications, against the Apprentice's more textual, geographical reading, establishing a dialogue that Lewis manipulates throughout the story, as in the following exchange:

Inspector of Wrecks

You see this a lot in late medieval mythology. The functions which previously belonged to the Goddess are taken over by men [...]

Apprentice

I don't see how that matters in the least [...]

Inspector of Wrecks

But it does matter [...] What we're seeing is the change from matrilineal inheritance to a patrilineal system [...] What the story's saying is that female creativity can be usurped by men. (*Meat Tree*, pp. 104-5)

In these exchanges, both the Inspector and the Apprentice point to their own *readings* of the tale as they experience it ('read this differently', 'what the story's saying'). The Inspector, or rather the role he assumes, is a parodic manifestation of academic discourse, which recalls Griffiths's earlier assertion regarding the social/cultural relevance of the *Mabinogion* beyond 'the pales of academia'. The Apprentice, however, with her more bullish language, gives voice to a more contemporary reaction (perhaps even Lewis's own) to the anachronisms of the source text.

In *The Meat Tree*, the temporal is rendered in spatial terms. After all, space travel is measured in light years, a unit of distance rather than time. This is connected to the Darwinian evolution theme in Lewis's text, in which the character of Blodeuwedd is posited as a product of evolution rather than any 'pseudo-medieval fancifulness' (*Meat Tree*, p. 75). Lewis describes the influence of Darwin in her afterword, in which she states:

I read a lot of sci-fi in preparation, ranging from William Gibson's *Neuromancer* to Alan Moore's graphic novel *Swamp Thing*. I thought that evolution would have a part in the story, so I found a copy of Charles Darwin's *The Power of Movement in Plants*, where he draws diagrams of the winding movements made by all vegetation as it

follows the sun. My plant, Blodeuwedd, though, was going to travel much further in her voyage to Mars orbit. (*Meat Tree*, pp. 250-1)

There is a rough contemporaneity between Darwin's work on evolution in the mid-nineteenth century and Lady Charlotte Guest's seminal translation of the *Mabinogion* that is, understandably, unacknowledged by Lewis; her inspiration for the evolution theme is said to be from a colleague while working in California at the Stanford Humanities Center. However, in Lewis's text the two publications provide an interesting, if unintentional, counterpoint to one another; while *The Meat Tree* text is a definitively twenty-first-century text, there is also an historical, nineteenth-century connection to the emergence of evolutionary theory, as well as the popularisation of Guest's translation.

The White Trail

The setting of Dafydd's novella *The White Trail* is clearly located in post-devolution Wales. However, Dafydd's text omits place names (although it should be noted that the character names are all the same as the original). The real and the imaginary geographies, both mundane and fantastical, nonetheless follow a similar route. They are also intertextually entwined with one another, as Dafydd writes in her afterword:

[Cilydd] inhabited commonplace territories like supermarkets and high streets and community halls, and yet somehow still carried the extraordinary landscapes of the *Mabinogion* deep within him. Whenever I was unsure where to turn, I would take a glance once again at the original tale, whose map seemed to dictate the rest of the

scene, whose signposts directed me to fantastical events which seemed almost at odds with the ordinariness of my characters' lives, but which simultaneously made perfect sense. Occasionally, almost coincidentally, both tales ended up bumping into each other at exactly the same place, a complex fictional crossroads.⁵¹

Cilydd's progress through the original tale and the retelling is indeed similar, and Dafydd's adherence to the map of the original is revealing. The ordinary/fantastical dichotomy is deconstructed by the 'fictional crossroads', in which the retelling is located. The ordinariness of the locations that Cilydd occupies are contrasted by those occupied by Culhwch, who gradually comes to realise that 'the world in which he lived was somehow not real at all' (*The White Trail*, p. 98).

The novella's setting in post-devolution Wales is identifiable by several references to an 'Assembly' and its location in the 'Bay'. The first appearance is in Cilydd's conversation with Doged's daughter: 'She said sometimes her father would take her to the Assembly and some of his staff would take her for a walk around the Bay' (*The White Trail*, p. 66). Dafydd's text doesn't stipulate that the Assembly referred to is the Welsh Assembly, or that the Bay is Cardiff Bay, but the Welsh setting would be recognisable to a reader familiar with the Welsh Assembly and its geographical location. Doged, whom Cilydd kills in the original tales, is instead recast as a Health Minister in the Assembly government. Not wanting to take responsibility for his incompetence in government, he explains: 'There was no question about it, I had to disappear. I'd made a real mess of things at the Assembly. All those hospitals I'd shut down, all those medical botches I'd had to cover up [...]' (*The White Trail*,

⁵¹ *The White Trail*, p. 207.

p. 141). The killing of Doged is reconstructed in Dafydd's retelling as a distinctly devolutionary narrative. It is, after all, the murder of an Assembly Minister, even if it isn't explicitly described in such terms in the novel.⁵²

An understanding of the novella's Welsh setting is dependent on a knowledge of the real geography of Wales (specifically the Cardiff Bay area and south Wales), as well as the overlaid imagined and fantastical geography of the *Mabinogion*. However, this is an inversion of the original tale, which is notable for its geographical precision. In their introduction to their translation of 'Culhwch and Olwen', Rachel Bromwich and D. Simon Evans suggest that the geography of the original tale is a clear indication of the author's distinctive local knowledge (and the imprecision of his knowledge of the world beyond this locality):

[The author's] detailed local knowledge of places and their geographical relation to each other was confined to the area of south Wales traversed by Twrch Trwyth and his attendant boars when they were hunted across the country by Arthur and his men [...] For early audiences many of the places and people alluded to in the story would have held resonances which they can no longer hold for us [...] they would have recalled other stories, familiar to these early audiences but now irretrievably lost to us.⁵³

⁵² The murder of an Assembly Minister in *The White Trail* may well be the first such occurrence in post-devolution Welsh writing.

⁵³ Rachel Bromwich and D. Simon Evans, *Culhwch and Olwen: An Edition and Study of the Oldest Arthurian Tale* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1992), p. lxxvii.

While the original author is unknown, their positionality is clearly revealed in their detailed rendering of Welsh geography and their imprecise knowledge of the spaces outside of Wales and Britain. However, while the imaginative ‘resonance’ of the original is ‘lost’ to a contemporary audience, its *real* geography is still clearly mappable. This geographical detail was noticed by artist and poet David Jones, who himself interpreted the Culhwch and Olwen myth in his poem ‘The Hunt’.⁵⁴ Jones also used Lady Charlotte Guest’s influential translation as a source text for his seminal poem *In Parenthesis*.⁵⁵ In a resonant response to a critical review of Glyn Jones and Thomas Jones’s influential translation of the *Mabinogion*, Jones writes: ‘Culhwch and Olwen [one of the eleven tales in the *Mabinogion*] [is] genuinely of the Island of Britain, the topography is known and felt; not vague as in the later Romance style, but exact and of a locality’ [my emphasis].⁵⁶ Jones suggests that the geography of the *Mabinogion* – or rather, its authors’ treatment of Britain’s geography – is the reason for its enduring power; it is ‘felt’, but not embellished or adorned like a Romance. Its lack of adornment, which is presented as a counterpoint to the ‘later Romance style’, gives the *Mabinogion* a more ‘exact’ sense of place (recalling Updike’s observation). The onomastic style of the original is useful to both contemporary readers (who would be familiar with its

⁵⁴ David Jones, ‘The Hunt’, in *The Sleeping Lord and Other Fragments* (London: Faber and Faber, 1974).

⁵⁵ See Paul Joseph Robichaud, *David Jones, Modernism, and the Middle Ages* (Doctoral Thesis, University of Toronto), p. 129

<<https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/15620/1/NQ63655.pdf>>

⁵⁶ D.B. Wyndham Lewis was critical of the translation in a review entitled ‘A Horn of Mead: *The Mabinogion. A new translation*, by Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones’, *Tablet Magazine*, 3 December 1949, p. 382. Lewis’s review dismisses Glyn Jones and Thomas Jones’s assertion of the importance of the *Mabinogion*. More perplexingly, he cites Arthur Machen (‘as Welch [sic] as Caerphilly cheese’), as an example of someone who thought the *Mabinogion* ‘pretty small beer’

<<http://archive.thetablet.co.uk/issue/3rd-december-1949/10/18544/the-word-of-god>>
David Jones, letter entitled ‘The Mabinogion’, in *Tablet Magazine*, 14 January 1950, p. 16
<<http://archive.thetablet.co.uk/issue/14th-january-1950/16/5550/letters-to-the-editor>>

geographies), as well as geographers themselves, who can (and have, extensively) pieced together the fragments and deduced the location of various landmarks and journeys (for example, the map 'Taith Y Twrch Trwyth' is a frontispiece of several editions and translations of the original myth).⁵⁷ However, *The White Trail* destabilises the original map, and in foregoing place names (other than the intimated Cardiff location) the text disconnects the story from its real geography, and re-replaces it in an ambiguous imaginary space. This problem is referred to directly by Dafydd in her afterword, in which she writes: '[...] how on earth was I to communicate [...] the vast geographic sprawl of the tale which takes the reader on heady, speedy trips to Ireland, then to Cornwall, and back over to Preseli, without pausing for breath' (*The White Trail*, p. 204). Dafydd's solution is twofold. First, the boar hunt, which features the most notable geographical 'sprawl' of the original tale (and was also a point of fascination for David Jones), is all but elided in Dafydd's text (which also maybe a consequence of the realistic style, in which a mythical boar hunt might be problematic). Second, the lack of specificity is mirrored in Culhwch's own lack of knowledge of the *real* geography outside of his immediate vicinity, who 'learned about places in the world in his geography lessons yet his mother insisted that you had to cross the forest to get to them' (*The White Trail*, p. 97).

Dafydd's novella thus re-inscribes a clearly devolutionary Wales into the original tale. To do so she omits several details (some significant, such as the boar hunt), and utilises an ambiguous, imprecise geography, in stark contrast to the original. Narrative episodes set in

⁵⁷ The map is the frontispiece in Rachel Bromwich and D. Simon Evans, *Culhwch and Olwen: An Edition and Study of the Oldest Arthurian Tale*.

the Assembly, and the murder of an Assembly Minister, place the text both literally and metaphorically in a post-devolutionary space.

Fountainville

The imaginary geography of Tishani Doshi's *Fountainville*, which is based upon 'The Lady of the Fountain', consists of two main areas: the 'Borderlands', and the 'Mainland'. Located within the former are two specific areas of importance to the narrative: the eponymous 'Fountainville', and 'Somaville'.⁵⁸ Politically speaking, the Borderland does not constitute a separate nation from the Mainland. While the original tale identifies Arthur's court at Caerleon-on-Usk as one of its central locations, *Fountainville* does not locate itself within any particular, *real* geographical location. This is perhaps a result of what Brynley F. Roberts has suggested to be the original tale's lack of 'secure geographical locations'.⁵⁹ So, the lack of geographical specificity is already embedded within the tale that Doshi is adapting. However, where the original still retains a sense of a geographical centre in Caerleon and a clear sense of locational relativity to this centre (such as when the characters leave Welsh or British soil), Doshi's rewriting foregoes any indication of national territory. Where the original tale implies border crossings, Doshi's text is defined by its setting in the borderland. As such, the recognisable centre of Caerleon is replaced by the 'Borderlands'. The ambiguous landscapes and lack of geographical details are reflected in Doshi's afterword, in which she writes:

⁵⁸ Doshi's etymology is unclear, but there is an echo of the drug in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (London: Vintage, 2007).

⁵⁹ Brynley F. Roberts, "'Peredur Son of Efwarg': A Text in Transition", *Arthuriana*, 10.3 (2000), 57-72, p. 57. Roberts also suggests that 'Geraint and Enid' and 'The Story of Peredur Son of Efwarg' are also lacking in geographical specificity.

Myths, like memories, are not constant. They are vague, changeable, geographically indeterminate, subsisting on layers and layers of ever-shifting narrative. [...] [They] don't accept boundaries. They are forever open and ready to be transformed.⁶⁰

While the myth that Doshi is rewriting does lack a 'secure' sense of real geography, the ethereal landscape of the original is foregrounded in Doshi's retelling. The rewriting and modernising of myth is clearly not a new or recent phenomenon. Tennyson incorporated elements of the *Mabinogion* in *Idylls of the King* (published 1859-85), and there have been several twentieth-century reinterpretations. Indeed, the oral tradition from which the tales of the *Mabinogion* originate itself indicates a culture of rewriting and revisioning. However, Doshi's 'geographically indeterminate' mythology is clearly mirrored by the novella's topographically unspecific, imaginary geography. Doshi writes

When I began writing *Fountainville* I knew I didn't want to write a story about a place that already existed. The original myth is so wonderfully unspecific in its geography that it allowed me the rare freedom of writing about anywhere. (*Fountainville*, p. 193)

Doshi's explicit removal of the myth from its original topography is important, but also raises some important questions. Both *Fountainville* and the original 'The Lady of the Fountain' create imaginary geographies, and while the lack of geographical specificity in Doshi's text may be reflective of the original, the context in which the modern text was

⁶⁰ Tishani Doshi, *Fountainville* (Bridgend: Seren, 2013), pp. 185-6.

produced suggests that its geography is still significantly *of* Wales, whether or not it is referred to explicitly. Doshi's removal of 'The Lady of the Fountain' from its original (if unspecific) Welsh topography is significant, but the rewritten text cannot wholly extricate itself from the original. Surrounding Doshi's text are several clear reminders of the tale's Welsh literary and geographical roots, such as Penny Thomas' introduction and synopsis of the original tale. This closes an interpretive gap between readers who have encountered the texts previously and those who have not. In this sense, the Wales of the original tale is clearly co-present in the new version, even though it is absent from Doshi's retelling.

While the geography in *Fountainville* is unspecific, it is identifiably contemporary. The narrator, Luna, announces that she was 'born in Fountainville in 1984' (*Fountainville*, p. 22), but she also encounters a signpost that establishes Fountainville's history: 'Welcome to Fountainville. Established 1501' (*Fountainville*, p. 18). Doshi fuses her tale with a true story about a surrogacy clinic in India,⁶¹ but there are other sources not acknowledged explicitly in the text.⁶² The capture of the story's villain, Marra, has distinct parallels with the capture of Saddam Hussein, and locates the story clearly within the twenty-first century:

The news channels spliced speeches of the Sheep-Man with scenes of Marra's jungle capture [...] They called it 'Operation Forrest Thunder' – after a movie of all things – one of the cheap action films they make on the Mainland [...] It took two months to

⁶¹ See *Fountainville*, p. 190.

⁶² The Lady of the Fountain is renamed 'Begum', which can refer to a 'queen, princess, or lady of high rank in Hindustan'. *Oxford English Dictionary* <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/17182?result=2&rskey=AuFez1&>>. Doshi writes that '[Nagaland] offered most of the topographical and anthropological details for my imaginary town, Fountainville', p. 191.

find him. To drag him out of a hole in the ground [...] They lifted him out – bearded, soiled, defeated. (*Fountainville*, pp. 170-1)

This passage clearly ‘dates’ the text, echoing the American military’s capture of Saddam, named after the Patrick Swayze movie *Red Dawn* (1984), and the description of the ‘bearded, soiled, defeated’ man emerging from an underground bunker distinctly echoes the ubiquitous video footage of Saddam’s capture.⁶³ The preoccupation with Iraq is also a central feature of Niall Griffiths’s *The Dreams of Max and Ronnie*, which will be discussed later in this chapter. The passage reveals the complexity of Doshi’s imaginative geography. Luna’s reaction to the capture of Marra (whose character doesn’t bear any other notable resemblance to Saddam Hussein), is in response to a news report on a television screen rather than a first-hand account. While the capture of Marra takes place within the imaginative geography of *Fountainville*’s ‘Borderlands’, the real-world capture of Saddam Hussein took place in ad-Dawr, Iraq. As such, the ‘spliced’ together images on the fictional television screen combine to form a complex spatial event in which the image (and the ‘real’ geography) of Saddam Hussein’s capture occurs in simultaneity with the fictional capture of Marra. Doshi weaves the ‘real’ event of Saddam Hussein’s capture into the imagined event of Marra’s, but accompanying this is a transference of a geographical referentiality. The territory of the ‘Borderlands’ combines with the territory of Iraq, as well as the Welsh geography of the original tale.

So, as a result of a complex integration of contemporary historical events (albeit one that is obscured by a further act of fictionalisation), *Fountainville* imports real Middle-Eastern

⁶³ *Red Dawn*, John Milius, dir. (USA: MGM, 1984)

geographies into its imaginary 'Borderland' location. However, the text in its entirety navigates a more complex geography; a result of several transferences of meaning and residual geographies. First, the connection to the original is both intertextual and intratextual: the original text is clearly invoked by the title, as well as its position within a series of other *Mabinogion* modernisations. The synopsis of 'The Lady of the Fountain', which appears following Doshi's story, locates the original in 'Caerllion ar Wysg', and as a consequence Doshi's text cannot remove itself entirely from the geography of the myth (*Fountainville*, p. 179). Furthermore, given the importance of onomastics to the original tales, *Fountainville* creates (and names) an imaginary location after a character from the *Mabiongion* (the Lady of the Fountain). Second, in understanding the spatial event of the text, we must acknowledge how integral multi-national contexts are to its reception. However, to remove the myth from its geography is not akin to de-emphasising the importance of place or geography to its narrative. Doshi writes: 'The fountain was, in a way, the central character – mysterious, magical, rooting the myth to a particular landscape [...] So it is something of an anticlimax when the fountain is so unceremoniously renounced' (*Fountainville*, pp. 188-9). As such, the text be understood as being 'about anywhere', but the spatial event of the text's reception emphasises the connection between its real and imaginary geographies.

A significant element of Doshi's retelling is placing Luned (who is renamed Luna) at the centre of the narrative, as opposed to the hero of the original, Owain (referred to as Owain Knight in Doshi's text). Citing the work of the Indian poet AK Ramanujan, Doshi writes

In male-centric myths, he [Ramanujan] wrote, the prince goes off on adventures and conquests, and this is how time is measured. But in female-centric myths, time is calculated between the interior and the exterior [...] I knew that my retelling of the myth would have to be female-centric, not least because the fountain is a fundamentally female symbol. (*Fountainville*, pp. 193-4)

While Owain is still a major character in *Fountainville*, his journey and adventures are significantly marginalised by the emphasis upon Luna's narrative. In the transformation of the narrative from male-centric into female-centric, Doshi alters the way in which the protagonists are physically able to move through the spaces in the text. Doreen Massey suggests that the way in which space is constructed and understood has an effect upon the way in which space is negotiated and transitioned, writing that:

Spaces and places, and our senses of them (and such related things as our degrees of mobility) are gendered through and through [...] And this gendering of space and place both *reflects and has effects* back on the ways in which gender is constructed and understood in the societies in which we live.⁶⁴

Luna's movement through the locations within *Fountainville* is undoubtedly restricted. She opines that 'what I wanted most of all was to escape Fountainville' (*Fountainville*, p. 167). However, her ability to escape is restricted, necessitating covert practices: 'We walk for two hours using the inner routes, away from the river and the road checkpoints' (*Fountainville*, p. 148). The movement of Owain in the original tale and *Fountainville* extends far beyond the

⁶⁴ Doreen Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender*, pp. 185-6.

borders of Wales and the Borderlands, and is, in comparison to Luna, relatively unrestricted. While the narrative is female-centric, the locations are still controlled and regulated by men. The feminist critique of the original tale echoes Lewis's *The Meat Tree*, and at one point Begum is accused of harbouring an 'antiquated gender politics' (*Fountainville*, p. 66). The geographical decentering of *Fountainville* from its original tale, and the main action's location in the Borderlands, is thus mirrored in the decentering of the narrative itself and its focus on the peripheral handmaid Luned rather than the hero/adventurer Owain. The geographical displacement and altered narrative progression are produced by Doshi's gendered interpretation of the geography of the original.

The Real Geography of *The Ninth Wave*

Russell Celyn Jones's *The Ninth Wave* presents a dystopian vision of south Wales after international oil supplies have been depleted. Unlike the geographically-specific source text ('Pwyll, Lord of Dyfed'), *The Ninth Wave* frequently omits place-names, while also referring to street names without referring to the town or city in which they are located. The novella describes Pwyll visiting Swansea, where he 'wound his way into town along Walter Road and the steep incline of Princess Way', but the city itself is not mentioned by name in the text, even though the street names will be recognisable to people familiar with its Swansea location.⁶⁵ Jones's description of Swansea marina bears some striking similarities to Peter Finch's representation of Cardiff Bay:

⁶⁵ *The Ninth Wave*, p. 77.

Many moons ago this marina had been implanted into the old docks with the best intentions. Traces of gantries, warehouses and coal trains had been left for aesthetic effect among energy-efficient, oxygen-producing glass office stacks [...] The marina, once described as ‘buzzing’ by estate agents trying to sell high-end residence there, was just another grog-shop location [...] Merchant ships had returned meanwhile, refitted with masts, sails and spars, and brought business back into what remained of the docks. (*Ninth Wave*, p. 114)

Several signifiers of the docks as a working harbour and of Swansea’s industrial past remain, of which Pwyll is keenly aware:

Every now and then he caught a glimpse of the necklace of industries around the throat of the bay – producing little more than memories now – and the lamb-white beaches stretching further west. Out at sea, cargo ships were slinging in from Yokohama, Shanghai; all those places [...] Since oil ran out, warfare had become medieval again. (*Ninth Wave*, p. 12)

As a result of the omission of the names of towns and cities (but clearly focusing on specific street-level locations), the reader becomes increasingly reliant on these markers, as well as on the descriptions of the landscape of south Wales, in order to understand the text’s geography. This may be a conscious decision on Jones’s part to render the ‘landscapes of Wales’ in greater detail, given that, as he writes in his afterword, they are ‘barely described’ in the original myth (*Ninth Wave*, p. 171). Modern Swansea features prominently in *The Ninth Wave*, although Jones subverts the onomastics of the original tale by placing an

emphasis on the mundanity of urban and suburban space, as well as the proliferation of (often American) chain restaurants and coffee shops. For example, the reuniting of Pwyll, Rhiannon and Pryderi, which takes place in Pwyll's court in Arberth, Pembrokeshire in the original tale, instead occurs in a 'Little Chef on the old A485' (*Ninth Wave*, p. 127).

In a scene typical of Jones's rendering of south Walian geography, Pwyll visits Baglan Bay (in Swansea Bay):

This way back skirted the Sandfields housing estate. He knew this scruffy tip was where Teirnon hailed from and could feel the steward's dis-ease as they rode into it. At its heart was a biomass power station that burned 500,000 tons of clean woodchip each year, producing high pressure steam to turn the turbines, generating 50MW in renewable electricity. Pwyll could still remember a time when a petrochemical plant had stood in its place. (*Ninth Wave*, p. 24)

Presenting a world that is 'post-oil' – as the back cover of the book informs the reader – *The Ninth Wave* makes repeated reference to the post-industrial landscape of south Wales.⁶⁶ This terrain provides ample opportunity for Jones to explore the idea of making the myth contemporary, while retaining the sense of the open, desolate narrative space of the original. The description of the south Wales landscape is clearly ironic, equating the desolate, de-industrialised landscape with a post-apocalyptic vision.⁶⁷ The representation of

⁶⁶ *The Ninth Wave*, back cover.

⁶⁷ This post-industrial landscape is also evident in the following passage: 'They moved on a reached the old slate quarry without sighting a single deer. Here the mountainside had been carved into terraces by a previous generation, exposing its blue, green, and purple belly to

contemporary Swansea is also blamed on substandard management by the town council rather than the degradation following an apocalyptic event: 'He had to hand it to them: the boys in the town planning department had really fucked up here. He even thought he recognized a few of them – parading about with hands in trouser pockets, surveying the place like generals [...] Only men who knew precisely nothing could create this bedlam' (*Ninth Wave*, p. 79). There are also visions of the consequences of the end of the fossil fuel economy, which is particularly pertinent in the mining towns near to the novella's described topography.

The novella's geographical specificity isn't confined to descriptions of urban and suburban spaces. At one point, Pwyll takes Pryderi hunting on Forestry Commission land, and while they 'saw no deer', they do notice an 'ostrich' ('an escapee from some local farm').⁶⁸ The replacement of deer with non-native ostriches is another example of the temporal rupture between the old myth and the new. The temporal shift from the setting of the original myth (which was nonetheless a representation of a real, or at least topographically accurate geography), is particularly striking. Teirnon, lord of Gwent, is now said to have been born in Sandfields housing estate (a real location that does not date back to the geography of the original tale).⁶⁹ The 'biomass power station' that generates renewable energy (which is in even more urgent need in an environment without fossil fuels) is also a real location (opened in 2003), as is the decommissioned BP petrochemical plant, which closed in 2004. The *real* geography of *The Ninth Wave* can thus be dated and mapped, and while there are

the light for the first time in millions of years [...] A dark blue Nissan perched at the lake's edge', (*The Ninth Wave*, p. 17).

⁶⁸ *The Ninth Wave*, p. 146.

⁶⁹ By this I mean to say that the area has been redefined by the Sandfields estate, not that it didn't exist prior to its erection.

some aspects that lack specificity, there is ample information for a reader to map its locations.

However, there is also an emphasis on mappable spaces, and mapping in *The Ninth Wave*. The characters don't possess the technologies utilised by Luna in *Fountainville*, such as GPS and mobile phones, and instead have to rely on intuition and training. Jones writes: 'Rhiannon studied literature and Pwyll was a geography graduate. "Geography..." she let out a long sigh. "That subject used to give me vertigo in school." Rhiannon had studied the great Walter Benjamin in her time at university' (*Ninth Wave*, pp. 93-4). Pwyll makes use of his cartographic skills in the novella, at one point '[m]ount[ing] up and heading along the old motorway, with a hand-drawn map in his hands' (*Ninth Wave*, p. 46). Pwyll's knowledge of the local geography is the source of his gradually increasing authority: 'As soon as he was able he met with Arawn's men to pass on the intelligence. They sat in the library and using ordnance survey maps and late-twentieth-century photo plots, pinpointed exactly where the plant was' (*Ninth Wave*, p. 53).

The reader's attempts to grasp the geography of the unknown, unidentified Welsh spaces in *The Ninth Wave* is mirrored in Pwyll's attempts to map the Otherworld in an attempt to find his son, Pryderi. However, Annwn (the Underworld) is resistant to the traditional cartographic methods applied by Pwyll in his search for Havgan, rendering it unmappable. The contrast between mythological and real space is clearly evident in Jones' text, as is the sense of vagueness that pervades tales in which the action takes place beyond the mappable castle walls, cartrefs, or kingdoms:

Charts of the British Isles lying one on top of the other he marked up with potential passages. He liked to exercise the navigational skills his father had taught him, and so many sailors had forgotten how to use. He etched in tidal and leeway vectors with a soft pencil, using dividers and protractors. (*Ninth Wave*, p. 115)

The most important geographical site of *The Ninth Wave*, Annwn, is one for which it is almost impossible to provide a single *real* corresponding geography. Pwyll's desperate search for Annwn (and his son, Pryderi), begins to mirror the reader's own disorientation in the increasingly ambiguous geographical space.

The Ninth Wave focuses on the sea as a passage to Annwn. Jones acknowledges this proximity: '[the original Pwyll narrative is] [s]et in south-west Wales, geographically close to where the Underworld was deemed to be' (*Ninth Wave*, p. 173). The Annwn of the original tale is located in the kingdom of Dyfed, but Jones's text and its rewritten mythology problematises this location. While the geography of south Wales is mostly intact in Jones's version, it remaps Pwyll's original journey to Annwn (which was undertaken entirely on land, or at least with no mention of crossing the sea of going underground). *The Ninth Wave* updates Pwyll's journey to Annwn, invoking the ancient ritual of the crossing of the ninth wave, and does so using the decidedly more modern practice of surfing.⁷⁰ During Pwyll's journey from a real geographical space to an imaginary one, he becomes increasingly reliant on seeking the ninth wave rather than the technology of charts, maps, and protractors. In doing so, Jones exposes the underlying intertextuality of the original myth. He alters the

⁷⁰ Another justification for the surfing theme can be seen in the following exchange between Pwyll and Pryderi: "'Surfing is a Celtic thing, is it not?" "Because surf's on the west coast, mainly," Pryderi said,' *The Ninth Wave*, p. 157.

circumstances of Pwyll's land-based journey to the Otherworld/Annwn, transfusing it with the ninth wave ritual of Welsh and Irish mythology.⁷¹ This is accomplished with obvious reference to the *Mabinogion*, as well as another Celtic intertext, *The Book of Taliesin*, which itself is invoked via Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*.⁷²

Jones mixes the original myth of Pwyll and Rhiannon becoming separated from their son, Pryderi, with several intertexts, through the titular metaphor of the 'ninth wave'. The most contemporary association of Jones's use of the ninth wave is in Pwyll and Pryderi's surfing, and in this context the ninth wave refers to the largest wave in a set (a theory on which it is difficult to find any scientific consensus). However, the ninth wave theory itself is not a specific surfing phenomenon. 'The Ninth Wave' was the title of a painting by Ivan Aivazovsky (1850), which depicts sailors clinging to the wreckage of a ship with a large wave looming above them.⁷³ The painting is echoed by the final scene in Jones's novella, where Pwyll and Pryderi are both nearly drowned while surfing. There is another significant mythological echo in Jones's use of the term, as it appears in Tennyson's 'The Coming of Arthur' from *Idylls of the King*, which was itself influenced by Irish (as well as Welsh) mythology and the journey to the Otherworld.⁷⁴ Tennyson's original, which is itself said to

⁷¹ There isn't adequate space to detail the Irish origins of the ninth wave ritual. More detailed information and links with Galician mythology can be found in Monica O'Reilly Vazquez, *Ritual and Myths Between Ireland and Galicia. The Irish Milesian Myth in the Leabhar Gabhála Éireann: Over the Ninth Wave. Origins, Contacts and Literary Evidence* (Unpublished Master of Arts thesis, Dublin City University, 2011) <http://doras.dcu.ie/16613/>

⁷² Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *Idylls of the King*, J.M. Gray, ed. (London: Penguin, 1996).

⁷³ Ivan Aivazovsky, *The Ninth Wave* (1850)

⁷⁴ J.M. Gray suggests that Tennyson took the idea of the ninth wave from Edward Davies's *Mythology and the Rites of the British Druids*, in Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *Idylls of the King*, p. 309. The second side of Kate Bush's seminal album *Hounds of Love* (1985) is also titled 'The Ninth Wave', and although Bush and Jones seem to refer to similar source material, any

be an interpretation of Edward Davies' *Mythology and the Rites of the British Druids*, connects the ninth wave to the birth of Arthur:⁷⁵

Dropt to the cove, and watched the great sea fall,
Wave after wave, each mightier than the last,
Till last, a ninth one, gathering half the deep
And full of voices, slowly rose and plunged
Roaring, and all the wave was in a flame:
And down the wave and in the flame was borne
A naked babe, and rode to Merlin's feet,
Who stoopt and caught the babe, and cried 'The King!'
Here is an heir for Uther!' [...]⁷⁶

By evoking the intertextual geography of the mythical ninth wave (and thus making a connection between Pryderi with Arthur), Jones creates a complex imaginative geography, one that not only updates and modernises the South Walian locations of the original, but also creates further intertextual connections between the original myth and other

connection appears unlikely (although Bush's seven-song suite *is* about a woman alone at sea hoping to be rescued).

⁷⁵ Robert Graves connects the 'ninth wave' to Blodeuwedd, writing: 'That Blodeuwedd's fingers are "whiter than the ninth wave of the sea" proves her connexion with the Moon; nine is the prime Moon-number, the Moon draws the tides, and the ninth wave is traditionally the largest. Thus Heimdall, Llew's counterpart, porter of the Norse heaven and rival of Loki, was 'the Son of the Wave' by being born from nine waves by Odin's (Gwydion's) enchantment'. Robert Graves, *The White Goddess: A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), p. 314.

⁷⁶ 'The Coming of Arthur', ll. 377-384, Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *Idylls of the King*, p. 31. This section is also illustrated in an etching by Gustave Doré entitled 'The Finding of King Arthur', in *Doré's Illustrations for 'Idylls of the King'* (London: Dover, 1995), p. 69.

mythologies (such as Arthurian legend via Tennyson). Additionally, Jones resituates Annwn in ambiguous territory. Pwyll's use of maps and navigation further embeds the idea of his striving for a supernatural location, whereas in the original tale the location of Annwn is more recognisably navigable.

The Dreams of Max and Ronnie

In *The Dreams of Max and Ronnie*, Niall Griffiths is also unspecific in his deployment of geographical details such as place names. However, the descriptions of certain places leave little doubt as to the locations to which he is referring, especially when read in tandem with the original myth. The representation of contemporary Welsh places in the re-written myth doesn't follow the post-industrial, *real* landscape offered in Jones's contribution. Afforded greater flexibility by source texts that are both related primarily through dream sequences ('The Dream of Maxen Wledig' and 'Rhonabwy's Dream'), Griffiths's text explores boundaries between the *then* of the original and the *now* of the retelling. The synopsis of the original myths provided in Griffiths's novella is also unspecific in its geography. A reader unfamiliar with the original myth or the geography that is described (but not specified) would thus be unable to plot the narrative journeys on a map. Griffiths's text illustrates some significant changes to the Welsh landscape that have occurred since the composition of the original tale, amplifying its temporal and spatial distance from the landscape of contemporary Wales. However, it should be noted that the connection between places (especially their names) and the original mythology, however pervasive, is often erroneous. The etymology of Ludgate Hill in London, for instance, is often incorrectly connected to King Lud. Likewise Beddgelert (in Gwynedd) and the myth of Gelert (the legendary hound). Gwyn

Jones refers to this problem as one of the narrator not fully understanding the tale that they are transcribing.⁷⁷ Griffiths addresses his omission of place names in the afterword to *The Dreams of Max and Ronnie*, writing that:

[It is a good thing when] the nomenclature of a country is intimately related to its mythology; the many place names in Wales that contain the word 'moch' or derivations thereof testify not to the localised history of porcine husbandry (of which there is none, or very little) but to the overnight stops made by Gwydion in his journey across the country with his personal herd of swine in The Fourth Branch.⁷⁸

Just as in the body of his text, Griffiths destabilises and subverts the onomastics of the original tales. While his reimagining does not make use of place names (or even create his own), this absence is brought into dialogue with the *Mabinogion's* onomastics in his afterword. *The Dreams of Max and Ronnie's* complex geography is thus overtly engaged with the textual geographic remnants of the original tales.

The opening section of Griffiths's text is 'Ronnie's Dream' ('Rhonabwy's Dream'). Griffiths utilises the dream as a vehicle to satirise the invasion of Iraq by British and American forces (amongst others) in 2003. The tale takes place during the weekend before Ronnie ('Rhonabwy') is due to be deployed for combat in Iraq, and the 'dream', rather than being induced by falling asleep on 'yellow ox-skin which gives good luck to anyone who sleeps there', is due to his consumption of unnamed drugs from Red Helen ('Heilyn Goch'), recast

⁷⁷ *The Mabinogion: Revised Edition*, p. xvii.

⁷⁸ *The Dreams of Max and Ronnie*, p. 156.

as a drug-dealer, euphemistically referred to as a 'purveyor of outlawed chemicals.'⁷⁹ The conflict of the original myth is mirrored by a game of 'gwyddbwyll (a board game similar to chess)' between Arthur and 'Owain son of Urien,' and takes place within Rhonabwy's dream (*Dreams of Max and Ronnie*, p. 150). The satire of the original, and arguably the interpretation that most closely corresponds to that of 'Ronnie's Dream', is that during the game between Arthur and Owain, the actual fighting surrounding them 'escalates into slaughter' (*Dreams of Max and Ronnie*, p. 150). The conflict in 'Ronnie's Dream' is confined to what Griffiths describes as the 'middle part of the ancient country that juts out like a belly from the bigger island to which it is joined', exacerbating the effect of the transposition to the conflict in Iraq (*Dreams of Max and Ronnie*, pp. 15-6). The difference between the conflicts is exposed when Ronnie reflects on a dreamed mid-Wales landscape:

And in this vision he and his two companions, this triune of gallantry, are traversing the central upland moor of the country where once heroes fought for identity and nationhood and self-governance with the ferocity of those who had nothing left to lose but life. Across the green desert of these central uplands they go [...] (*Dreams of Max and Ronnie*, p. 26).

The invocation of heroes fighting for 'nationhood' appears to be an allusion to Owain Glyndŵr's uprising, but there are significant mid-twentieth-century echoes of a re-energised Welsh nationalism, as well as the late-twentieth century achievement of 'self-governance' in

⁷⁹ *Dreams of Max and Ronnie*, p.149, p. 24.

the form of devolution.⁸⁰ Griffiths recognises the similarity between the political situation in the original and contemporary versions: 'Enough to say that I find a contemporaneity in both dreams which on careful re-reading came close to astonishing. Timeless writing indeed' (*Dreams of Max and Ronnie*, p. 158). The metaphorical blurring of the green 'deserts' of mid-Wales and the anticipated landscape of the conflict in Iraq thus reconfigures the geopolitical conflict of the original in a post-devolutionary context.

Ronnie dreams of the anti-war protests that notoriously preceded the Tony Blair-led Labour government's decision to enter into conflict in Iraq. Such protests, represented in a dream, attain an almost mythological status, and their slogans are repeated in Griffiths's text: NOT IN MY NAME on the flank and NO WAR FOR OIL on the door flap [of the tent]' (*Dreams of Max and Ronnie*, p. 65). Tony Blair, whose is never mentioned by name, is referred to only as the distinctly grotesque 'grinner', who 'stands and stares too, the palings of pale enamel between his lips shining' (*Dreams of Max and Ronnie*, p. 91). The combatants in Iraq are correlated with a slightly more mundane, but nonetheless discomfiting allusion to football hooligans.

Then something about British soccer hooligans abroad and the measures that the host country of the European Championship in a year's time will be taking to prevent known troublemakers from crossing its border. (*Dreams of Max and Ronnie*, pp. 61-2)

⁸⁰ Griffiths's novel *Sheepshagger*, in its portrayal of English second-homers, also has echoes of twentieth-century movements such as Meibion Glyndŵr.

Griffiths ironically compares the anticipated border crossing of Ronnie (into Iraq), and the modern-day border crossing of football hooligans.

Hooligans, or Max's 'Questers in Kappa', re-enter the narrative in 'The Dream of Max the Emperor'.⁸¹ Below is a description of an unspecified castle in north Wales that Max and his accomplices encounter in their search for the woman he has dreamed about, 'Helen' (Elen):

There's a town on the edge of the sea, on the banks of a river that flows into that sea. A colossal castle in that town, dominating it so that the town seems to be just the castle, all castle, or as if those buildings that are *not* castle are just chunks of masonry fallen from the tall towers and battlements. At the castle's main entrance, the side closest to where the estuary widens into open sea, many pleasure boats are moored, some of them huge, floating houses. A blare to this marina of wealth and luxury and available adventure (*Dreams of Max and Ronnie*, p. 130).

In the original myth, Maxen Wledig dreams of and finally finds Elen in Cair Seoint, an old Roman fortress. But while the consequences of Maxen's romance with Elen in the original myth result in the building of forts at 'Arfon, Caerfyddin and Caerlleon', there were also real ramifications for the local geography (*Dreams of Max and Ronnie*, p. 153). Arnold Taylor writes in a history of Caernarfon Castle (the castle described in the passage above):

From the very beginning, Caernarfon Castle was conceived as a fortress-palace of some special significance. It was to be a stronghold brimming with image and

⁸¹ *Dreams of Max and Ronnie*, p. 127.

symbolism. An age-old folk memory had long associated this place with the imperial world of Rome, a tale enshrined in the well-known Macsen Wledig romance of the *Mabinogion*. King Edward I (1272-1307) chose to build on this legend. He decided to encourage his brilliant master mason and military engineer, James of St George, to build a castle that would echo the walls of the Emperor Constantine's Roman city of Constantinople.⁸²

The castle encountered by Max's 'Questers' was – in common with many of the built environments in the *New Stories* – built significantly after the original myth was composed. Perhaps more notable is the fact that the castle that is described in detail by Max's 'Questers' was itself inspired by the original myth. The *real* geography encountered by the 'Questers' in Griffiths's rewritten myth is one that was created partially from an interpretation of the original myth, creating a multi-tiered geography that is influenced by the myths that inspired its creation.

While 'Ronnie's Dream' transposes the conflict in the background of the story to Iraq, 'The Dream of Max the Emperor' moves the centre of Maxen's empire from Rome, Italy, to 'Rome', a nightclub in Cardiff. Significantly, the landscape of Cardiff is one that has been affected by the dual forces of privatisation and devolution. However, while the new text describes a realistic Cardiff geography, the north Walian locations are initially much truer to the fantastical visions of the myth. The narrative takes place predominantly in a dreamed

⁸² Arnold Taylor, *Caernarfon Castle and Town Walls*, Sixth Edition (Cardiff: Cadw, 2004), p. 3. First published in 1953. Brynley F. Roberts discusses the genealogical connection between Macsen and Constantine in more detail. See Roberts, '*Breuddwyd Maxen Wledig: Why? When?*', pp. 306-7. Also, see John K. Bollard, '*Landscapes of the Mabinogi*', p. 51.

landscape, and Griffiths's text frequently mirrors this in a kind of hallucinatory portrayal of north Wales (this time without the aid of 'outlawed chemicals'). When Max's dream takes him through north Wales on the way to Caernarfon, he realises that '[i]n the real world, his docklands flat and his designer clothing and expensive accoutrements and appliances meant nothing here. This was where he belonged' (*Dreams of Max and Ronnie*, p. 108). Later, when Max first encounters the castle in reality (rather than in his dreams), he declares: 'I feel safe and secure and settled when ancient masonry and memory are at my shoulder; castles and megaliths and ruins and the like, and the human histories they hold in their stones' (*Dreams of Max and Ronnie*, p. 156). However, Max initially feels alienated from the mid-Wales landscape through which he travels. This echoes Brynley F. Roberts argument, that 'Maxen is more function than hero; he has no real genealogy and his descendants are *ad hoc*, he is not confined to any particular area and he has no firm location'.⁸³ The alienation is not confined only to Max, but also affects his 'Questers'. While the landscape of mid-Wales is journeyed-through, the difference in north Wales is keenly felt by Max's confidante, 'Thirteen':

And then the three of them converse in their own language, the tongue of the country to which Thirteen has been told many times over he belongs but which he's never felt to be true, the tongue he's rarely heard in the city that has forever been his world, the tongue that has excluded him from the country he's been told he belongs to (*Dreams of Max and Ronnie*, p. 144).

⁸³ Brynley F. Roberts, 'Breuddwyd Maxen Wledig: Why? When?', *Heroic Poets and Poetic Heroes in Celtic Traditions: A Festschrift for Patrick K. Ford*. CSANA Yearbook 3-4, Joseph Falaky Nagy and Leslie Ellen Jones, eds. (Dublin: Four Courts Press. 2004), 303-314, p. 305.

By replacing the language conflict between Roman soldiers and Welsh-speaking subjects (from the original tale), to English-speaking Cardiffians and the Welsh-speaking population of mid and north Wales, Griffiths creates a modern analogy for the alienation felt by Max/Macsen. During Max's dream-journey through the unknown (to him) country of Wales:

He dreamt that he was travelling through the country that lay beyond his city's borders, a place he'd never visited, and had never had any wish to, but that he knew existed because of the stories he'd heard and pictures he'd seen. It was a place of mountains and crags and lakes and water-falls. (*Dreams of Max and Ronnie*, p. 107)

Max has never experienced any *real* Welsh places beyond Cardiff, and his geographical imagination, and his dream itself, is itself based upon stories and pictures. When he wakes, Griffiths writes:

Max thinks: the north of the country. Mountains and lakes. Deep valleys. Castles and ruins and rain and forests just like in his dream. No, not a dream – a prophecy. That dream was telling him something. And that something was that he must get his arse north. (*Dreams of Max and Ronnie*, p. 123)

The real conflict that Griffiths's version of Max encounters is that Helen, the woman in his dream, does not meet his expectations. The geographical environment of Caernarfon is striking in its difference to Max's native Cardiff. The climax of the original, in which the women's tongues are cut out to prevent them from contaminating the speech of the

soldiers, is replayed in an equally grotesque scene in which Thirteen ‘sucks [Helen’s] tongue into his mouth then bites down as hard as he can [...] and in the screaming chaos that followed he spits a chunk of meat out of his mouth’ (*Dreams of Max and Ronnie*, p. 145). However, Max accedes to Helen’s dowry request to build three forts and a network of roads to link them all. McMullen suggests that the dowry is yet another emphatic territorial statement by the original author, writing that: ‘In both the journey to Elen and her creation of the three forts, the author of *Breuddwyd Maxen Wledig* is very topographically conscious of the geographic area in which the text is situated’.⁸⁴

The incompatibility of Max and Helen is foreshadowed by the journey of the ‘Questers’ to the north:

Here, distance as it corresponds to mileage is an unknowable quantity; straight roads do not exist so short distances necessitate long journeys. Confusion. Time and space inhale and exhale. Contract and expand. Dreamland, this. Conforms to no known physical laws. (*Dreams of Max and Ronnie*, p. 129-30)

The landscape of Wales that is so neatly (and quickly) traversed by Max and his Questers in their journey takes place in a decisively short section of the narrative. In terms of distance travelled per page, where Cardiff to Caernarfon takes place in the space of two pages, the journey between Caernarfon and Segontium (*Cair Seoint*), takes up comparatively little narrative space. The lack of narrative space is perhaps reflected in the diminution of Max’s ‘thirteen messengers’ – those who are tasked with finding Elen, the woman of Macsen’s

⁸⁴ McMullen, p. 233.

dreams, in the original – into a single character, ‘Thirteen’. The diminishing of rural spaces is evidenced in the description of the ‘Questers’ journey, whereby:

each one feels a small falling-off as they enter a land they don’t recognise, through valleys between dark slag-mountains and past heaps of refuse and rotting industrial machinery, past rusting pitheads and smelters and quarries and all of it a-crumble.
(*Dreams of Max and Ronnie*, p. 127)

There follows an exceptionally detailed, topographically accurate representation of Caernarfon, told through a narrator who displays a ‘firm sense’ of north Walian geography (similar to the writer of ‘Pwyll, Lord of Dyfed’).

He writes with a keen eye for topography, and his account of the approach to Caernarfon (Aber-seint, caer Aber-seint) and the precise delineation of the narrow coastal strip between the Menai Straits and Snowdonia [...] could have been written only by one who had travelled these roads and surveyed the scene for himself. The author has a firm sense of geography.⁸⁵

However, the narrative framing of the depiction is initially through Macsen’s dream, a man who, in both the original tale (Rome, Italy), and Griffiths’s version (‘Rome’ nightclub, Cardiff), has no prior knowledge of Caernarfon. Both McMullen and Roberts’ valuable historicised readings do not explore the narrative structure of Macsen’s prophecy, or how it is that he has such a geographically accurate dream. Where the original tale doesn’t offer a

⁸⁵ Roberts, p. 306.

clear answer, Griffiths's version does: Max's detailed knowledge is a dream-like accumulation of 'the stories he'd heard and pictures he'd seen', a combination of real and imagined geographies, made more real by way of the technologies through which they are experienced: photographs, stories, and even 'mobile phone[s]' and 'documentar[ies]' (*Dreams of Max and Ronnie*, p. 133).

In the context of devolution Griffiths explores the political geography of contemporary Wales. There are three historical settings for Griffiths's Maxen myth. The first two are the historical settings: Wales (and Caernarfon) as a Roman-occupied territory, and Wales at war with the Anglo-Normans (with Caernarfon as a bastion still resistant to their rule). The third is post-devolution Wales, in which Caernarfon has become subsumed by the political power of Cardiff.⁸⁶ 'The Dream of Max the Emperor' mimics the textual resistance of the original tale, described by McMullen:

This is how the conceptual geography of Ynys Prydein [the Island of Britain] can merge with the physical geography of Roman Britain – in looking forward to a time of Welsh autonomous control of the land, the author looks back, through the layers of the landscape, to a semi-contiguous period where there was a unified Prydein and a rightful king of Britain.⁸⁷

In the original setting (composed roughly a thousand years prior to the medieval version), Caernarfon is the centre of Roman influence in Wales, investing it with greater political

⁸⁶ McMullen, p. 234.

⁸⁷ McMullen, p. 238.

power than Cardiff. During the time in which *Breuddwyd Maxen Wledig* was composed, Caernarfon represented a stronghold of Llewelyn ab Iorwerth, and this shifts the emphasis of the tale from heroic to propagandist. As Roberts writes: 'If the events of 1215-17 underlie Elen's choice of cities [that form part of the dowry Macsen is due to pay] they become a statement not simply of Maxen's symbolic status but more especially of Llewelyn ab Iorwerth's dominance'.⁸⁸ This argument is continued by McMullen, who argues that,

If historically situated within the culture that produced it, *Breuddwyd Maxen Wledig* becomes a textual enunciation of the attempt to hold onto "Welshness" sought by much of the Welsh nobility, while simultaneously a powerful political tool in the pursuit of independent Welsh sovereignty.⁸⁹

Furthermore, McMullen suggests that

Through an imagined historical continuity between Roman Britain and contemporary Wales, these places become re-colonized by the Welsh through the text and [...] point forward to a possible return to a unified Wales.⁹⁰

So, the imaginative space of Griffith's text, while not referring to devolution directly, envisages (through a series of intertextual invocations), a Wales that is actively pursuing (and fighting for) its sovereignty. Griffiths's replacement of Rome, Italy with Rome, the Cardiff nightclub, resituates Max in the new centre of devolved Welsh democracy. The

⁸⁸ Roberts, p. 311.

⁸⁹ McMullen, p. 232.

⁹⁰ McMullen, p. 240.

process of reclaiming sovereignty is common to both the original tale and Griffiths's version, although in the aftermath of devolution the reclamation appears to be attaining more significant traction.

Conclusion

While the *New Stories* approach the *Mabinogion* in markedly different ways, and produce texts that veer between being realistic and supernatural, there is perhaps a greater similarity between them than is readily apparent from the readings above. There are Welsh geographies represented realistically (as in *The White Trail*, *The Ninth Wave*, and *The Dreams of Max and Ronnie*), but some are also imaginatively reconstructed beyond Wales (such as in *Fountainville* or *The Meat Tree*). However, there is a significant overlap between these real and imaginary geographies. The intertextual geographies of the *Mabinogion* (the locations and journeys of the original tales), are replayed in more recognisably contemporary spaces (and in a way that has points of confluence with Sinclair's psychogeographical intertextualising of Welsh mythology). Perhaps most significantly, the texts in the series are connected by the newly-devolved funding apparatus that enabled its production. This is a series of texts produced with a view to extending the reach of the *Mabinogion* beyond the borders of Wales, as well as 'the pales of academia'. As such, it serves to illustrate not only the importance of public funding for literary production in post-devolution Wales (which was arguably just as important prior to devolution), but the way in which conserving and modernising a distinctly Welsh mythology is intrinsic to building a post-devolution literary culture in Wales. Furthermore, the recurrent themes of sovereignty, mapping, language, and borders resonate between each volume, expanding visions of an

intrinsically Welsh text beyond the borders of Wales. While stylistically different to the *Real* series, the *New Stories*' hybrid geographies provide the fundamentals of a resistance to cultural homogenisation.

And it is in this resistance (and persistent problematising of essentialist constructions of Welshness), that the *New Stories* are of most importance to this thesis. In presenting radically recontextualised versions of the *Mabinogion* (expanding upon Sinclair's own attempts to reimagine the mythology in London), the recognisable 'real' Welsh geographies from which these myths originally emerged are once again displaced. Most comparable with Sinclair's reinterpretation of south Wales, for example is Jones's *The Ninth Wave*, a novel in which the original mythological locations are updated, and a reader is confronted with a radically different, de-industrialised south Walian location. The following chapter, which discusses Seren's other post-devolution series of travel books, the *Real* series, will also converge on some of the same locations, in a non-fictional post-devolution context. In doing so, this thesis will expand its argument regarding devolution as a 'spatial event', one in which real and imagined locations are discussed through the lens of devolution.

Chapter Six: Devolving the 'Real' Wales: Rendering Space in Practice and Theory

Having already discussed an aspect of Welsh fiction (Seren's *New Stories from the Mabinogion*) in the wake of 1997 devolution referendum, this chapter will focus on contemporary Welsh non-fiction, with specific reference to the work of the various contributing authors to Seren's other post-devolution series: the *Real* series. The *Real* series' multifocalized approach insists upon the discursive relationship between real and imagined geographies. It draws attention to the different ways in which space might be represented in literature (and the varying 'literariness' of these approaches), and suggests a way in which positivist cartographies, tourist brochures, and the overwriting of space resulting from both urban and rural regeneration, might be resisted.

The *Real* series is a multi-author project engaged in re-writing and re-mapping post-devolution Wales (2002-present). The series is an exemplary site for literary geography and its insistence on the motivated relationship between literature and place. The *Real* guides defy easy categorisation; they are palimpsestic and plural, spanning various genres and subverting the conventions of both normative travel literature and the local guide book. They are also, importantly, not simply inward-looking; they gesture from Welsh spaces to wider national, and international, spaces and identities. The publication of the series was conceived at a time in which the rendering of space was at its most political; their genesis can be traced back to an article written by the Cardiff poet Peter Finch published by the Aberystwyth-based *Planet* magazine in 2000, in the wake of the 'Yes' vote of the Devolution

referendum of 1997, and the subsequent creation of the Welsh Assembly in 1999.¹ The article was commissioned by John Barnie (then editor of *Planet*), in response to the visible changes to Cardiff's landscape. These new developments in the city were thought of by Peter Finch as 'worth remarking on in a Welsh context'.² However, when the article was originally conceived, of the three buildings most readily associated with the new administration in Cardiff Bay, only one had been completed: the recently erected Millennium Stadium (1999). The Wales Millennium Centre (2004), and the Senedd (which houses the Assembly government, 2006) were not finished until significantly later. The three volumes of *Real Cardiff* are thus markers of the gradual and increasingly visible changes occurring in the city. As such, the *Real Cardiff* trilogy discusses devolved space, both directly and indirectly. It also discusses the significant private developments, as well as the areas that have not seen development on the same scale (or even those areas that have witnessed underinvestment and gradual decline). For example, in *Real Wales* Finch contrasts Aberystwyth with both Cardiff and Swansea in the following terms: 'Aberystwyth is no burgeoning city, redevelopment is minimal, its skyline is not full of cranes. The sense of alienation you get in places like Cardiff or even Swansea is absent here'.³

Nonetheless, the Assembly buildings in both Cardiff and Aberystwyth were erected as a direct consequence of the referendum and the establishment of a new political body, to which (certain) powers were devolved from Westminster. The result of the referendum was a paradigmatic shift in the discourse of devolution, a subject of impassioned debate long

¹ The article, entitled 'Culture and the City', appeared in *Planet*, 138 (Dec/Jan 1999-2000), 19-25.

² Peter Finch, personal communication, 19 March 2013.

³ *Real Wales* (Bridgend: Seren, 2008), p. 129

before the previous (unsuccessful) referendum of 1979. The changing Cardiff landscape was thus dually imbued with both privately and publicly-funded developments. As Peter Finch, a lifelong Cardiff resident, says:

Many of us would like to think that the massive changes in the infrastructure and the built environment [in Cardiff] were a unique thing but they're not; [the changes were] driven by the economic boom [and the] making of money from property development [which was a] UK-wide activity.⁴

The changing Cardiff landscape was dominated by private property development, but of particular significance, at least in a 'Welsh context', was the changing perception of the social space of the city, reflected in Finch's *Planet* article, in which he notes sardonically: 'many locals [...] have now embraced Welshness totally, rather in the style of Shirley Bassey, and can be observed flying the Ddraig Goch [the 'red dragon' – national flag of Wales] from the back of their taxis and sticking croeso ['welcome'] on their shop front doors'.⁵ While the architectural changes in Cardiff are undoubtedly important to a discussion of the effects of devolution on urban space in Wales, Finch draws attention to the observable increase in signifiers of 'Welshness' in Cardiff's residents; its altering cultural space. However, 'in the style of Shirley Bassey' is a somewhat dubious honour, and Finch has noted elsewhere that Bassey's embrace of Welshness was not without its contradictions, as Finch writes: 'Shirley Bassey, the one famous Cardiffian who loved us and left as fast as the money could take

⁴ Peter Finch, personal communication, 19 March 2013.

⁵ Peter Finch, 'Culture and the City', p. 20. Also, *Real Cardiff*, p. 11.

her, has even been seen wearing a dress made from the flag's red dragon'.⁶ Finch's *Real Cardiff* books document the changing material space (Firstspace) of the city, along with its visibly increasing embrace of Welshness, however shallow or aesthetic. Indeed, while Finch is often cynical about such expressions of Welshness, he recognises the importance of Wales's new political institution, the Welsh Assembly Government, to the promotion of culture within Wales. In *Real Cardiff Three* he describes a reading by the poet (and *Real Wrexham* contributor) Grahame Davies attended by Dafydd Elis Thomas (former leader of Plaid Cymru). This visible political presence, Finch contends, 'had shown that politicians in this small country value culture just that little bit more than they do elsewhere'.⁷ While there is no shortage of scepticism towards the effect of devolution on Cardiff, Finch appears supportive of the prominent part that culture was to play in the newly devolved administration. So, while private development in Cardiff Bay clearly predates the 1997 referendum, the discourse of devolution can be seen to have both recontextualised and co-opted these changes. Most fundamentally, devolution resulted in the formation of a national institution within which both political and cultural Welshness might be articulated.

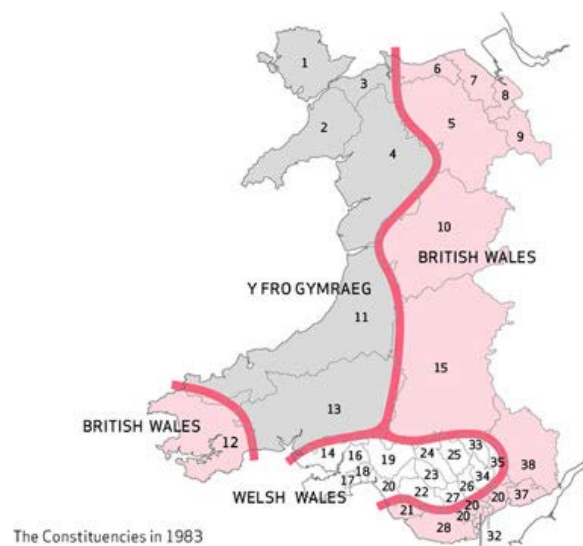
⁶ Peter Finch, 'Cardiff, Kairdiff, Caerdydd', *Agenda* (Winter 2003-04), pp. 52-4, 54.

⁷ *Real Cardiff Three* (Bridgend: Seren, 2009), p. 118.

Devolution and Mapping



The Western Mail's 'Divided' Map, 22 September 1997



Dennis Balsom's 'Three Wales Model'

Responses to the question of the 1997 referendum, which asked voters whether or not they agreed that 'there should be a Welsh Assembly', were disseminated cartographically; a map

(that has now become a ubiquitous visual signifier for the referendum) was produced by the *Western Mail*, dividing Wales between the west's 'Yes' vote (with the exception of Pembrokeshire), and the east's 'No' vote, each in stark, coloured contrast to one another.⁸ Pembrokeshire is a pertinent, perhaps microcosmic, exception to this Manichean map, containing, as Damian Walford Davies writes, 'that unseen cultural and linguistic "border", the Landsker, between the county's "Englishry" and its "Welshry"'.⁹ This new 'unseen' border is made visible in the map, of which Paul O'Leary writes:

Our new icon is the divided map of Wales, constructed out of the results of the devolution referendum... [i]n its stark simplicity, this map stood as a reproach to the supporters of devolution even in their moment of triumph.¹⁰

While O'Leary condemns the 'divided' map as 'of little worth', it is clear that the map itself is a striking, if not heuristically accurate, portrayal of the political state-of-mind of the population of Wales, albeit on a single issue, and at a specific time (18 September 1997).¹¹ It also renders one of Wales's 'unseen' borders completely visible, and represents the enduring power of a simplistic cartographical representation of national identity. However, the map itself is disingenuous; while it encodes and dichotomises the results of the referendum within the visual impact of a bicoloured map, it is also, necessarily, rhetorical. This map of devolution, in its stark colour-coded presentation (deliberately reminiscent of the 'Ddraig Goch'), suggests that Wales is split simply between those unitary authorities

⁸ The map originally appeared in *The Western Mail*, 22 September, 1997, p. 10.

⁹ Davies, *Cartographies of Culture*, p. 7.

¹⁰ Paul O'Leary, 'Of Devolution, Maps and Divided Mentalities: Deconstructing a New National Icon', *Planet: the Welsh Internationalist*, 127 (Feb/March, 1998), 7-12, p. 7.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

who share the eastern border with England, and those distanced from the border (at least geographically), in the west; a macro-Landsker, writ large along the breadth of the country. What the map does not portray, or perhaps what it hides, are the acute margins on which the vote was decided; in doing so it reduces the manifestly plural 'state of the nation' to an easily digestible ideal, *visibly* reinforcing the stereotypical narrative of Wales as a nation divided *invisibly* by an 'Englishry' and a 'Welshry'. From a total of twenty-two authorities, only three (Neath Port Talbot, Carmarthenshire, Gwynedd) could claim a 'Yes' vote majority of more than 60%; only four (Flintshire, Newport, Vale of Glamorgan, Monmouthshire) secured a similar majority of 'No' votes. The percentage of the population eligible to vote at the time who actually voted 'Yes' was 25.2%, and the national winning margin was merely 0.6%.¹² The 'divided map of Wales' clearly displays a particular, and subjective, narrative, and can be analysed with the same kind of scrutiny and scepticism as a literary text. Syntactically and grammatically the map and literary text share a system of signs; both can be looked upon, studied, and deconstructed as 'texts', each being a rhetorical construct reliant on an unstable semiotic system predicated on substitution and absence.¹³ The divided map occupies space by attempting to legitimise a politically reductive (rhetorical) voting pattern (narrative) over a map of Wales. In occupying the space of Wales, however, the map itself becomes embroiled in the discursive space to which Davies has alluded. A necessary wariness of cartographical positivism precludes any validation of the map as 'true'; though it has stood as a 'reproach to the supporters of devolution' in many forms. A slightly modified version, with varying shades of red and green to denote the strength of the

¹² Richard Dewdney, 'Results of Devolution Referendums (1979 & 1997)', Research Paper No 97/113 (November 1997), p. 17. Available at: <<http://www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/RP97-113>>

¹³ Although the map's syntax and grammar is perhaps more metaphorical.

vote (and removes the visible tear through the middle of Wales), appears prominently on the current Wikipedia page dedicated to the referendum.¹⁴

This 'divided' map distinctly echoes Dennis Balsom's 'Three Wales Model', first printed in *The National Question Again* in 1985 and re-used in John Osmond's 2002 article 'Welsh Civil Identity in the Twenty-First Century'.¹⁵ The 'Three Wales Model' divides Wales into three sections: the border counties and parts of the south east constituting 'British Wales', the north and west 'Y Fro Gymraeg' (Welsh-speaking Wales), and a Welsh-identifying but predominantly English-speaking 'Welsh Wales' in the Valleys. Balsom's model itself echoes an earlier contention by Alfred Zimmern: 'There is Welsh Wales; there is industrial or, as I sometimes think of it, American Wales; and there is upper class or English Wales', evidencing how persistently Wales has been split by 'unseen' borders based on perceived cultural difference.¹⁶

The *Western Mail* article below the 'divided' map describes the eastern counties of Wales using the telling metaphor 'hugging the border', and also states erroneously that these areas 'flatly rejected the Assembly option'.¹⁷ In a discussion of the Wales England border, Chris Williams has suggested that

We are in the apparently paradoxical situation that, as the processes of globalization

¹⁴ See: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Welsh_devolution_referendum, 1997>

¹⁵ *The National Question Again*, J. Osmond, ed. (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1985); John Osmond, 'Welsh Civil Identity in the Twenty-First Century', p. 80.

¹⁶ Alfred Zimmern, cited in John Osmond, 'The Valleys as an industrial frontier', *Click on Wales*, 11 October 2010, <<http://www.iwa.wales/click/2010/10/the-valleys-as-an-industrial-frontier/>>

¹⁷ Lee Wenham, *The Western Mail*, 22 September, 1997, p. 10.

seem to render borders less and less relevant, more and more porous, the changing constitutional settlement in Wales has made the Welsh border more important than at any time in modern history.¹⁸

The new 'constitutional settlement' – that is, devolution – has thus redefined the Wales-England border. Consequently, we might now understand the recurrence of Zimmern's and Balsom's constructions of Wales, and the *Western Mail's* more overtly political map, within the context of an intensification in the importance of the border since devolution. The headline accompanying the 'divided' map alludes to the prevalence of this unseen border, declaring unambiguously: 'Yes-No divide opens old wounds'.¹⁹ The article's insistence on controversial metaphors (the border counties 'hugging England', the 'old wounds'), combined with the map's metaphorical tear through the middle, as well as the barely credible assertion about areas that 'flatly' rejected devolution, indicate an internalisation of the bordered mentality since devolution.

Since the 2010 UK General Election, which resulted in the first UK government without a Labour majority since the establishment of the Welsh Assembly (which has remained a Labour stronghold since 1999), the significance of the border as a marker of political difference has increased. The rhetorical power of the 'divided' map and its lack of nuance reflects, and is reflected by, this political discourse. In 2014, David Cameron, referring to the Labour-led Welsh Assembly's management of the Welsh NHS, suggested that Offa's Dyke (which, it should be stated, is an anachronistic rough-estimate of the modern Wales-

¹⁸ Chris Williams, 'A Post-National Wales', *Agenda* (Winter 2003-04), 2-5, pp. 3-4.

¹⁹ *The Western Mail*, 22 September, 1997, p. 10.

England border), had become the 'line between life and death'.²⁰ It must be stated that there is a clear (and absolute) difference between the unseen borders within Wales and the 'actual' border with England. However, in both cases the borders are a display – which is nonetheless both inaccurate and inarticulate – of political and cultural difference.

So, while the divided map is disingenuous and clearly imbued with political rhetoric, it retains a powerful presence in a discussion of devolution in Wales. Robert Tally, responding to the work of Franco Moretti, emphasises that 'the map does not in itself explain the phenomenon, rather, it helps to identify a phenomenon that then needs to be explained'.²¹ However, it is unclear in this case whether the 'divided' map does indeed identify a phenomenon in a similar way to Moretti's maps of the European novel for instance.²² In both instances data is produced, analysed and portrayed cartographically. The divided map, as O'Leary states, not only contributes little to the analysis of devolution, but objectively distorts such analysis. The article accompanying the map itself concedes that '[t]he geographical divide is plain to see. However, the referendum highlighted many other divisions which cannot be drawn on a map'.²³ One phenomenon that requires explanation in this case might be how it is that a map that is so disingenuous and misleading retains such rhetorical power. However, there are several phenomena encoded within the 'divided' map. As one reader commented on O'Leary's article in the subsequent issue of *Planet*:

[O'Leary is] wrong to argue that the divisions are more complex than red for No,

²⁰ *Wales Online*, 11 April 2014 <<http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/offas-dyke-line-between-life-6954652>>

²¹ Tally, *Spatiality*, p. 109.

²² Franco Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel* (London: Verso, 1998).

²³ Lee Wenham, *The Western Mail*, 22 September, 1997, p. 10.

green for Yes. He needs but a single colour for all the huge Don't know / don't Care mass who stayed at home.²⁴

The map, or rather, this particular map, is incapable of rendering any such nuance. Accompanied by a headline that announced the opening of 'old wounds', the map served to reinforce a narrative of a Wales that was ideologically split down the middle on the issue of self-governance. To further emphasise this split, the map visualises the metaphor by displaying Wales as torn in two.²⁵

O'Leary's article also states that the map, in addition to misrepresenting the voting data, is based on a false premise: that the majority of each constituency had the same bearing on the result as it might in a 'first-past-the-post' system, such as that employed in general elections. O'Leary suggests that the confusing constituency demarcations on the map lead to Powys, 'a unit of limited use for analysing voting patterns dominat[ing] the map visually'.²⁶ Given its low population density (the lowest in Wales at twenty-six people per square kilometre), Powys nonetheless dominates the map due to its sheer topographical size. As a border county in Balsom's 'British Wales' that voted against devolution, the red of Powys has a disproportionate effect on the image. If this map reveals several phenomena (without explaining them), one is surely the residual rhetorical power of representing Wales as somehow 'divided'. To paraphrase Tally and Moretti, the 'divided' map can only identify the problem, and is incapable of explaining it. If a wariness of cartographical positivism

²⁴ A.G. Roberts, 'Attitude', *Planet: The Welsh Internationalist* 128 (1998), 92-93, p. 93.

²⁵ Pembrokeshire, coloured in red as a result of its No vote of 57.2%, somewhat problematically remains attached to the Yes voting green area.

²⁶ O'Leary, p. 9.

precludes us from validating this particular map as true, it is difficult to see how another map (such as those suggested by O'Leary) might remedy the situation. Indeed, O'Leary's attempts to present a new version of the divided map in his article are still vulnerable to the same criticism. In this sense, two-dimensional mapping is clearly an inadequate method with which to represent Welsh attitudes to devolution, or the effects of devolution on particular demographics. The danger in such an approach, to appropriate Immanuel Wallerstein, is that to treat opinion of devolution in Wales as fundamental to the identity of Welsh citizens results in the subordination of 'individuals of all classes to their status as citizens of the nation-state'.²⁷

Introduction to the *Real* series

It is within this context that literature might provide an opportunity for a deeper mapping of Welsh spaces, one that can elucidate and even contest the cumulative effect of bordered mentalities and their cartographic representations. When discussing the representation of a contested space – one that contains and is surrounded by many visible and invisible borders, linguistic, geographical, political, social – one must also look at the previous definitions of space that have become places, the former signifying the uninhabited, the anonymous; the latter lived-in, not just by people but also by the discourses that have come to define it.²⁸ Building upon Harley's description of the map as a 'technology of power',

²⁷ Immanuel Wallerstein, in Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, trans. Chris Turner (London: Verso, 1991), p. 92.

²⁸ '[Place is] space to which meaning has been ascribed', is a useful reiteration of this difference offered by Erica Carter, James Donald and Judith Squires (eds.), *Space and Place: Theories of Identity and Location* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1993), p. xii. Doreen Massey persuasively contests this definition by arguing that it is a corollary of the 'political

Doreen Massey contends that maps ‘position the observer, themselves unobserved, outside and above the object of the gaze’.²⁹ The problem with the ‘divided’ map as a representation of space (such as that of Cardiff), is that it cannot account for transition or for temporal change, whereas the *Real* series can do so explicitly (the subtitle for *Real Cardiff Three* is ‘The Changing City’). This change occurs by both physical and attitudinal means. The changing landscape of the urban centre as well as the increase in support for devolution across Wales, evidenced by the significant swing in the Cardiff electorate’s Yes vote, from 44.4% in 1997 to 61.3% in 2011, indicate the improved traction of the devolution project in response to its observable effects. As suggested in the chapter four, the increased support for devolution in 2011 was not necessarily indicative of an increased sense of national identification. So, if the stance of Cardiff’s population towards devolution at the time of the referendum in 1997 was less than enthusiastic, it has evidently shifted to a more supportive stance, which was reflective of a national pattern of increased support for the Assembly.

The shifting physical and human geography of the Cardiff landscape is most visible in the south of the city, about which Finch writes: ‘[w]hat was the Docks became Cardiff Bay. This was much to the annoyance of locals who continue to call the place what they always have – Butetown’.³⁰ Finch suggests this particular location within Cardiff is contested, and its rebranding resisted by the ‘locals’. The area’s purpose has been redefined, and the docks

imaginary’ of the global (space) and the local (place), Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage, 2012), p. 183. Michel De Certeau contends that the difference between space (*espace*) and place (*lieu*) is that: ‘space is like the work when it is spoken, that is, when it is caught in the ambiguity of an actualization, transformed into a term dependent on many conventions [...] In contradistinction to the place, it has thus none of the univocity or stability of a “proper”. In short, *space is a practiced place*.’ *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 177.

²⁹ Doreen Massey, *For Space*, p. 107.

³⁰ Peter Finch, ‘Culture and the City’, p.21.

are now associated with commercial ventures, finance, and hotels, rather than with industry. Iain Sinclair's cynicism regarding the Cardiff Barrage project ('the coastal strip', cited in chapter three), is a useful corollary of Peter Finch's criticism of the same area, although Sinclair's exilic status (and Finch's insider, 'Academi Boyo' status) naturally affect the treatment and understanding of devolution in their respective work.³¹ Space is not simply developed and contested in the physical sense, however; its meanings are produced and understood through various forms of literature, art, music, and cartography, among others. Space is defined, at least in part, by the various fictions with which it abounds. In encountering these different textual forms, a reader traverses the illusory borders between texts of different types, whether those purporting to represent an empirical 'reality' in a scientific manner, as in maps (in the most traditional, positivist sense), or those literary fictions that knowingly exploit the border between perception and representation. This border is, in the case of Wales and its landscape, heavily politicised; the meanings that have been historically ascribed to certain places (such as the Landsker) are neither uncontested nor incontestable. So, the changing space of Cardiff Bay is developing new meanings, and creating new points of conflict for its inhabitants.

The resistance to the rebranding of the Cardiff Docks (into Cardiff Bay) is emblematic of a wider literary cynicism towards and even resistance to the narrative of grand projects (such as that found in Cardiff Bay). Sinclair, whose book *Ghost Milk*, an extended critique of grand projects, was nominated for Wales Book of the Year in 2013, connects the Cardiff Bay project to his own resistance to the Olympic project in London. He writes:

³¹ *Landor's Tower*, p.263. See also, Sinclair's reflection on the redevelopment of Swansea Bay: 'Ballardian lagoons [...] filled with income streams from money that does not yet exist', *Black Apples*, p. 167.

[*Ghost Milk* is] a book that responds to recent enclosures, grand projects, surveillance systems. Themes as pertinent to Cardiff Bay as to the Isle of Dogs. To anywhere opting to use the word 'marina' instead of dock or harbour.'³²

The *Real* series, like Sinclair's work in London, can be seen as a response to such projects. While this resistance can take the form of protest, in the *Real* series it takes the form of a literary, textual resistance. So, on one end of the spectrum the *Real* series might be seen as a resistance to the homogenisation of Cardiff docks and the physical and social consequences of regeneration, its search for the 'real' becoming a challenge to the politically expedient 'imaginary' narrative. That the series is distinctly heterogeneous in its approach reinforces this contention. However, while literature might be a discourse that can challenge cartographically positivist definitions of space (or rather rejecting the homogenising influence of cartographical representation such as the 'divided' map), it can clearly also reinforce such definitions. As might be expected with a multi-author project that covers a wide range of rural and urban areas with diverse geographies and populations, the *Real* series is not immune to reinforcing borders and definitions of place. For example, what was originally planned and advertised as a volume called *Real Pembroke*, was eventually published as *Real South Pembrokeshire*.³³ While no other volume in the series is divided or bordered in a similar fashion, it is significant that the Pembrokeshire volume is. As Damian Walford Davies suggests: '[the] title bears witness to the continuing corroboration and

³² Iain Sinclair, "Notes from a Welsh book prize" [interview with Iain Sinclair], *Wales Online*, 12 May 2012, <<http://www.walesonline.co.uk/lifestyle/notes-welsh-book-prize-2050070>>

³³ Published as Tony Curtis, *Real South Pembrokeshire* (Bridgend: Seren, 2011), it was listed as *Real Pembroke* in the 'Coming Soon' section of Mario Basini's *Real Merthyr* (Bridgend: Seren, 2008), p. 2.

construction of that unseen cultural and linguistic 'border', the Landsker'.³⁴ The area south of the Landsker has commonly been referred to as part of 'Little England Beyond Wales' (which also includes southern Carmarthenshire), and in Welsh as 'Sir Benfro Saesneg' (English Pembrokeshire). That only south Pembrokeshire warrants a *Real* volume reinscribes a problematic 'illusory' border. While 'Landsker' is a term which was originally used to refer to a *real* boundary, it has since the early twentieth century been used almost exclusively to refer to a language border, which, in electoral terms, is not reflective of any 'real' geographical border.

A further point of contention is the geographical coverage of the series. The series has so far published eighteen volumes, with fifteen located in Wales. Of these, there is a clear focus on locations in southern areas of Wales: three focus on Cardiff, two on Swansea (as well as one on the Gower). As a series that was published as a direct response to devolution, a rudimentary analysis of the series' geographical coverage of Wales shows that there is a continuing bias towards locations in the south. This potentially reflects the continuing political imbalance between north and south Wales, which has intensified since devolution and the establishment of the south as the new political centre of Wales. There is also a significant disparity in terms of contributions from male and female writers, with only two of the eighteen volumes written by women (Ann Drysdale's *Real Newport* and Lynne Rees's *Real Port Talbot*).³⁵ While this pattern is clearly not reflective of the emergence of women writers in post-devolution Welsh literature (as the comprehensive analysis of the 'Devolved Voices' project has demonstrated), it could also be attributed to the (equally problematic)

³⁴ Davies, *Cartographies of Culture*, p. 7.

³⁵ It is perhaps worth noting an article entitled 'Psychogeography Along the River Usk' by Chris Paul, which appeared in *Poetry Wales*, 44.4 (2009), pp. 23-5.

male-centric-ness of the genre.³⁶ The feminist rewriting of the city found in the work of Zoë Skoulding and her contemporaries contrasts with the overwhelmingly male gaze of the *Real* series, while also focussing on an area of Wales (Bangor) yet to be reconnoitred by the *Real* project.³⁷ Bearing such potential issues in mind however, the *Real* series remains the most valuable post-devolution deep-mapping literary project in Wales. There are gaps in its coverage of Welsh topography, but the series provides a substantive (and knowingly subjective) engagement with devolved spaces (one that it clearly influenced by the work of Sinclair and his contemporaries such as Will Self), rather than attempting to portray a panoptic vision of contemporary Wales.

In the readings below, I have chosen to employ the critical discourse of literary geography articulated in chapter one, highlighting the 'literariness' of various texts, as well as analysing the spaces both within and outside the text. The *Real* series, it could be suggested, occupies a borderland between literature ('literariness') and geography, and is involved in both the dissemination and consumption of space as well as the creation of a formal aesthetic that borrows from various genres. While focusing on the geographical work that the texts are conducting, these readings will also focus on several aspects of literary production. The cover art, the place of the *Real* series within the travel guide 'market', the organisation of

³⁶ Lauren Elkin's book *Flâneuse: Women Walk the City in Paris, New York, Tokyo, Venice and London* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2016) has provided a much-needed corrective to the assumption of psychogeography as a predominantly male genre.

³⁷ Such as in Skoulding's edited, collaborative collection, *Metropoetica* (Bridgend, Seren, 2013). See also the work of Doreen Massey and her attention to the way in which spaces are gendered: 'Spaces and places, and our senses of them (and such related things as our degrees of mobility) are gendered through and through [...] And this gendering of space and place both *reflects and has effects* back on the ways in which gender is constructed and understood in the societies in which we live', *Space, Place, and Gender* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), pp. 185-6.

the series around a set of central guidelines all make decisive contributions the series. The *Real* author is a disseminator of space and the reader is a consumer, but the different literary and aesthetic properties of the *Real* texts, including poetry and cartographical journeys, intertextual fictions, complicate any simplistic dichotomy. It is in the process of textually mapping space that the series dually contests traditional modes of travel writing, as well as the reductive cartographic mapping of Welsh identity since devolution. Peter Finch says of his initial thoughts for the first book in the *Real* series:

By and large what drove [previous authors' attempts to write about Cardiff] was their subject matter, not their ability to write. There didn't seem to be much art in what they did, there was certainly no literature.³⁸

The *Real* series emphasises the relationship between textual and physical geography. It is also 'literary', in the sense that its contributors are commissioned professional writers and poets, and don't produce guide books or brochures like the local enthusiasts mentioned by Finch. In his introduction to Ann Drysdale's *Real Newport*, Finch writes:

In order to roll out the idea [of *Real Cardiff*] across the rest of Wales I have taken on the role of series editor and have contracted with a range of authors, most of whom have some literary experience as novelists or poets, and put in train what already looks like the unstoppable. Certainly the unfinishable. The pace of change in Wales is currently so great that after the passage of as little as five years locations transform

³⁸ Peter Finch, personal communication, 19 March 2013.

themselves, opinions shift, and perceptions alter totally.³⁹

As such, the series appears to be aimed at a reader who is either not a tourist and has no immediate intention to visit, or a distinctly non-traditional tourist. The books are often difficult to decipher (given their digressional style and persistent shifting between and blending of prose and poetic registers), and the photographs rarely focus on subjects that a more normative guide book might. Finch expands upon his assessment of Cardiff writing in his initial *Planet* article: 'In literary terms Cardiff has spent far too long exhibiting Victoria Park values, harking back after Billy the Seal, Clarksies pies and pints of dark'.⁴⁰ If Finch is disparaging in his assessment of the previous attempts at writing the city, he is equally, and frequently, disparaging about the city itself (as are the other contributors about their localities). As Finch writes in his first Real Cardiff missive: 'Over the years the writing community has not served the city [Cardiff] as well as it could have.'⁴¹ However, Finch also clearly points out that the city has not served its writing community either, given the number of publishers and literary institutions that now operate in locations such as Swansea and Aberystwyth.⁴²

So, the architectural development in Cardiff Bay was not simply the result of the establishment of the Welsh Assembly, but also of a broader influx of capital investment in the city, which had a particular impact in the Bay area. The Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, set up by the UK government in 1987, had already instigated an initial process

³⁹ Peter Finch, preface to Ann Drysdale, *Real Newport* (Bridgend: Seren, 2006), p. 10.

⁴⁰ Peter Finch, 'Real Cardiff' <<http://www.peterfinch.co.uk/cardiff.htm>>

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Finch discusses this in more detail in 'Real Cardiff'.

of development and regeneration in the area. One of the principal aims of the development of the Bay was to 'reunite the city centre of Cardiff with its waterfront'.⁴³ This principle aim (which has since been realised in the area surrounding and including the Wales Millennium Centre and the Senedd) has had a significant impact on both the geography of Cardiff and its residents, especially Cardiffian natives such as Finch. As Finch observes:

Cardiff's history has been badly served by the rush of the late twentieth century. The gallop for profit has given us new bars and apartments to be proud of [...] A great boulevard [Lloyd George Boulevard] connects the old city with the new [...] But the past has largely been forgotten. Cardiff is now a modern city – dense, growing, anonymous' (*Real Cardiff Two*, p. 11).

This development has, amongst other things, led to the swift and irreversible redefinition of the area that Finch previously knew as Butetown. In light of such significant development and the establishment of the Welsh Assembly in the new Cardiff Bay, Finch's search for the *Real Cardiff* highlights the various contradictions and paradoxes at the heart of the capital's redevelopment. This development has in turn had a significant, and lasting impact, on the rendering of Cardiff in both fiction and non-fiction. The Bay has become the epicentre of Welsh politics and is host to perhaps the most significant internationalist symbol of Wales's commitment to the arts, in the form of the Wales Millennium Centre. Reinforcing this post-devolution impact of the new Bay are its appearances in several BBC series since the turn of

⁴³ See the 'Cardiff Harbour Authority' website: <<http://cardiffharbour.com/the-regeneration-project/>>

the century, such as *Doctor Who* and its spin-off, *Torchwood*.⁴⁴

Cardiff is by no means the only place in Wales to experience the material effects of devolution, and, while the *Real* series began in a distinctly post-devolution context, it has since expanded to areas that have not witnessed the same level of investment or change as a result of the referendum. However, while the material Firstspace of some Welsh towns and cities may have seen little change, devolution might provide a context with which to challenge those dominant Secondspaces of Wales, namely the enduring historical, political, and geographical narratives associated with those spaces.

The *Real* Series and its Contemporaries

The *Real* series utilises a *multifocalized* (to use Westphal's term) approach, in the frequently unique presentation of the page, which may contain text, both prose and poetry, photography, maps, and, in Finch's case, allude to original and curated online features; in this sense the series presents itself as different to traditional travel guide writing (critiquing, perhaps even satirising its conventions and the positivist assumptions on which it is predicated), whether fictional or non-fictional. The social space of Wales, not limited to those places that are located west of the border with England, and the positionality of the texts within the series conveys complexity and hybridity in a way that the divided map cannot; each text moves between poetic and fictional representational spaces and more

⁴⁴ Mario Basini makes a virtue out of the absence of BBC filming crews: '[Merthyr] Full of myths [...] Never used as a setting for *Torchwood*. No millionaires,' *Real Merthyr*, p. 9.

traditional representations of space, reminiscent of Westphal's multifocalized approach. The *Real* series, like most travel literature, divides its individual projects spatially, each title identifying a certain place: *Real Swansea* (2008), *Real Aberystwyth* (2008), *Real Powys* (2011).⁴⁵ The absence of maps within these guides, beyond the occasional frontispiece, is a distinctive feature that sets the *Real* series apart from its Welsh contemporaries, such as *The Rough Guide to Wales* (1994), or the *Lonely Planet* series (2007), as well as its forbears, such as Faber's *Shell* guides published throughout the twentieth-century, and the Welsh-language *Crwydro* series.⁴⁶ The series' beginnings are in the volume *Real Cardiff*, a city that has twice more received the 'real' treatment.⁴⁷ It is not without deliberate irony that the term 'real' is used in these texts, aware as many of the writers in the series are that representing a reality is as impossible in language, the primary form of these texts, as it is in cartography.⁴⁸ In this sense the series implies a post-Harley understanding of space and place. While recognising the power (and practicality) of, and occasionally deferring to cartographical representation, the series gives the impression of a scepticism towards fixed definitions of place. To achieve this the books continually shift between different modes of visual representation, as well as the different linguistic registers of both poetry and prose.

⁴⁵ Another publication by Seren that combines the textual and visual in a more thematic way is *Holy Wells: Wales: a photographic journey*, by Phil Cope with a foreword by Jan Morris (Bridgend: Seren, 2008).

⁴⁶ Examples of these series are: Mike Parker and Paul Whitfield, *The Rough Guide to Wales* fourth ed. (Rough Guide: 2003); [Lonely Planet] David Atkinson, Neal Wilson, Abigail Hole, *Wales* third ed. (London: Footscray, 2007); [Shell Guide] Vyvyan Rees, *Western Wales: Cardiganshire and Merioneth* (London: Faber and Faber, 1971); [Crwydro] Ernest Llwyd Williams, *Crwydro Sir Benfro* (Llandybie: Llyfrau'r Dryw, 1958).

⁴⁷ Peter Finch, *Real Cardiff* (Bridgend: Seren, 2002). See also *Real Cardiff Two* (Bridgend: Seren, 2004) and *Real Cardiff Three* (Bridgend: Seren, 2009).

⁴⁸ Poetry and photography are the two other modes that most, if not all, of these texts employ.

In its opening passage, *The Rough Guide to Wales*, a key competitor in the contemporary Welsh travel-guide market, declares that Wales, unlike Ireland and Scotland, has not been reduced to 'misty Celtic pastiche, [it] remains brittle and brutal enough to be real'.⁴⁹ The contention is that the 'real' has historical connotations; that Wales' Celticity is more intact than that of Scotland and Ireland, less subservient to the commodification of the image (the national stereotype) that one may encounter in those nations. 'Celticity' is itself a loaded signifier; its signified is a historical Celtic hyperreality in which expectations of 'Celticness' on the part of the tourist have begun to affect the place itself. This Celticity is also a production of a complex process of incorporation and 'internalisation', as Joep Leerssen writes:

the classification 'Celtic' has been imposed from the outside, by scholars from metropolitan Europe, writing about these nations but rarely for them (let alone on their behalf). The term 'Celt' has only very recently (in the last hundred years or so) come to be used in the first person, as the result of an internalisation process of what was originally a term from outside.

[...] The construct 'Celt' carries with it, in its origin and original currency, the echo of a specific power relationship. Those who were called 'Celts' had no power over the fact that they were beginning to be called that name; they underwent, passively, a process of scrutiny, investigation and classification over which they had no control. To name the world around us means, at least to some extent, and at least intellectually, to control it. To be so named means to be subject to someone else's

⁴⁹ *Rough Guide to Wales*, p. iii.

control.⁵⁰

As the *Rough Guide* states somewhat problematically, Wales has not exploited its Celtic-ness, or reduced it to the level of pastiche. While in itself this statement is deeply problematic, it is perhaps more reflective of a similar problem demonstrated by the 'divided' map. There is a distinct lack of nuance in both instances, and it has the effect of reducing Wales to the level of soundbite or cartographical label. This 'soundbite' Wales, itself a symptom of the *Rough Guide* and the tourism-focused travel guide, is clearly a construct that seeks to commodify authentic Celticity as currency in the tourism industry (i.e. 'don't go to Ireland or Scotland, come to Wales instead').

In suggesting that other Celtic nations trade on the image, an abstraction of their roots, the *Rough Guide* appears to project a vision of a Celtic Wales that is more 'real' and evidently more 'brutal'. Underlying this essentialist statement is a further process of commodification; Wales' Celtic (hyper-) 'reality' is paradoxically averred to be more 'real' than that of other Celtic nations, but that very statement (which 'sells' Wales in the form of a travel guide), significantly problematises any notion of authenticity. The *Rough Guide's* use of Celtic-ness is, paradoxically in a post-devolution context, an 'internalisation' of an anachronistic 'power relationship' and a defiant claim to authenticity and difference from other kinds of Celtic-ness. The 'real', I would contend, has three main connotations in its deployment within the series.

⁵⁰ Joep Leerssen, 'Celticism', in *Celticism*, Terrence Brown, ed. (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996), 1-20, pp. 4-6.

First, the 'real' has ironic connotations. The series, in borrowing from (and subverting) other forms, strives to become a different, new, kind of travel literature. Indeed, the primary aim of the series, if it can be said to have one, is to represent places in Wales and the vast difference between its spaces in a suitably inclusive, hybrid, and perhaps most importantly, transferable style. This process is not confined to within the borders of Wales; there are volumes on Liverpool, as well as Bloomsbury and the South Bank in London, and the focus here is not simply (if at all) on these places' 'Welshness'. As suggested above, however, the act of signifying an 'authentic' vision of Wales inscribes a paradoxical process that rejects that project (that is, a *Rough*-style project), as philosophically flawed. What the *Real* series engages with and ironises are the different texts that constitute place, as well as the material Firstspace.

Second, the advertising of the 'real' is politically significant. It could be suggested that since the devolution referendum in 1997 and the subsequent establishment of the Welsh Assembly in 1999 there has been a paradigmatic shift in the representation of Wales in literature (or at least the way in which literature is discussed critically in Wales); the England-based volumes in the series emphasise that this change is not restricted to Welsh boundaries. I would contend that this shift has engendered changes not only in traditional Welsh travel writing, but also in the many hyperrealities that are a result of a tourist industry that trades in Wales's Celticity, and have been inscribed in various guides throughout the twentieth century.⁵¹ Travel writing and the *dérive*, no longer the preserve of the city-dweller, have taken on a new resonance in this re-mapping project; they compete

⁵¹ For a UK-wide example, see: Deborah Krasner, *Celtic: living in Scotland, Ireland, and Wales*, with a foreword by Jan Morris (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990).

with normative modes of disseminating space, not in order to provide a prescriptive alternative, but to problematise the very notion of place. Jan Morris, in her review of *Real Cardiff*, writes that '[t]his is a marvellous book - one of the very best books about a city I have ever read [...] I skip most of the poems, which I don't understand, but everything else in it is gripping me so fast that I have momentarily suspended my first ever reading of *Wuthering Heights*.'⁵² Unsurprisingly, only the first part of this quotation (before the ellipsis), is visible on the cover of *Real Cardiff*. Morris's note also alludes to the difficulty of Finch's strategy in *Real Cardiff*. Finch's textual mapping of Cardiff is itself alienating (perhaps mirroring the alienation Finch clearly feels in certain areas of his hometown), and Morris's reading renders this alienation as absence. Morris's reflection on *Real Cardiff* (and her unwillingness to read Finch's poetry as intrinsic to the *Real* project) is symptomatic of her view of south Wales as somehow not in keeping with her vision of Wales and Welshness. Finch maintains a paradoxical status as an 'outsider' of the establishment, and his poetry, which is often experimental, prevents any closed reading of his text (*pace* Jan Morris's playful blurb).⁵³ However, although problematic, the poetry in Finch's *Cardiff* books should not be disregarded as, in Marc Brosseau's terms, a 'parasitic' element; an experimental technique that obscures his text's geography. Indeed, the poetry should be emphasised as intrinsic to the geographical work that Finch's text is conducting, as it foregrounds alienation and absence as intrinsic to the representation of the city.

Third, in foregrounding its own 'real' status, the series simultaneously proposes and

⁵² Full quotation available on Peter Finch's dedicated *Real Cardiff* website:
<http://www.peterfinch.co.uk/cardiff_revs.htm>

⁵³ Mike Parker writes that '[Finch's] place is that of an outsider, even when the poet in question has become, ostensibly at least, part of the Establishment', from *Planet* (Winter 2003). See <http://www.peterfinch.co.uk/cardiff_revs.htm>

reinforces the idea that other travel guides to Wales have in some sense lacked a basis in 'reality', or that their approach has been essentialist and prone to reductive methodology. The series addresses the 'newness' of post-devolution Wales, while also reinstating those marginalised places ignored by different guides. As Peter Finch wonders in *Real Cardiff Two* (2004), 'Cardiff's past has been stripped and washed so thoroughly clean that I begin to wonder if we might have invented it'.⁵⁴ The unmasking and reinvention of the past are common themes in Finch's writing on Cardiff; indeed, his project is the most expansive in the series, affording him the opportunity to revisit and rewrite places explored only ten years previously. The emphasis upon the heterogeneity of space in the *Real* series as a whole is given a temporal twist in Finch's series; the reader is not just reading a place as it *is*, they are reading a place that is in the process of *becoming*, and whose contours have already shifted since the previous *Real* engagement.⁵⁵ In this sense there is no devolved space in *Real Cardiff*, only spaces that are in the *process of devolving*. This process is mostly absent in contemporary travel guides, which favour a format whereby the new edition continually replaces its predecessor (rather than adding to it), as can be seen in its *Rough Guide* contemporaries. The need to continually re-map the places in a *Rough Guide* is no doubt driven by commercial necessity, the micro-details of notable restaurants, bars, and hotels require constant updates. The *Rough Guide to Wales* is currently in its eighth edition, and the most recent no longer lists *Real Powys* author Mike Parker as a contributor. Parker has noted his reasons for no longer writing for the *Rough Guide* series: '[I] loathed the nitpicky details, price codes, star ratings, formulaic straitjacket and bewildering feedback

⁵⁴ Peter Finch, *Real Cardiff Two* (Bridgend: Seren, 2004), p. 74.

⁵⁵ For an example of Finch's attention to the transitory nature of space, his introduction to *Real Cardiff Two* is subtitled 'Cardiff: Wales behind, Europe in front', p. 9. Francesca Rhydderch does describe Finch as a writer 'who seeks to tell it as it is', in her Foreword to *Cardiff Central: Ten Writers Return to the Welsh Capital* (Llandysul: Gomer, 2003), p. viii.

from readers'.⁵⁶ The *Real* series, with its self-conscious avoidance of *centres* and its occasionally (deliberately) alienating methodology, as well as its unwillingness to *recommend* an experience to the reader and propensity for tangential wandering, stands in contrast to the 'nitpicky' approach of the *Rough Guides*.

Real Photography and the Subversion of Aesthetics

The *Real* series' authors are specifically required to provide their own photographs, which are, as Finch says, 'supposed to be an extension of the writing'.⁵⁷ This prevents the kind of overtly aesthetic, all-encompassing photography that might occupy a more tourist-focused travel guide. The cover photographs of the series tend to feature close-ups of otherwise unremarkable facades or buildings, mirroring the textual focus on unremarkable perspectives of place contained within the books themselves.⁵⁸ *Real Wales* and *Real Llanelli* both feature municipal signposts, the former a speed limit sign on an empty beach, the latter a CCTV warning in front of Parc Y Scarlets (home of Llanelli RFC). The cover of *Real Swansea Two* features a picture of Swansea Castle with the BT Tower looming large in the background.⁵⁹ As such, the series juxtaposes the historically revered spaces (likely those recommended by other guide books), with the unavoidable signs of the 'real'. The need to prevent antisocial behaviour in the vicinity of Swansea castle with CCTV or speed limits

⁵⁶ See Mike Parker's website: <<http://www.mikeparker.org.uk/about.html>>

⁵⁷ Peter Finch, personal communication, 19 March 2013.

⁵⁸ Nigel Jenkins's *Real Gower* and Mike Parker's *Real Powys* volumes are the exceptions in this regard. While clearly a ground-level photographs, both focus on a landscape uninterrupted by architecture.

⁵⁹ *Real Swansea Two* (Bridgend: Seren, 2012)

might thus be seen as a counterpoint to the 'ASBO'-preventing pink street lights of Cardiff. However, while the *Real* cover photographs are predominantly anonymous (and anonymising), Finch's *Real Cardiff Two* emphasises its authorial positionality in its cover photograph, which features a prominent reflection of Finch in a large sculpture taking the photograph.⁶⁰

Photographs in the *Real* series frequently feature as a rebuke to traditional guide books and tourist brochures. However, unlike maps, photography is a significant part of the *Real* project. In *Real Wrexham*, Grahame Davies writes:

Guidebooks and websites often have their pictures of the [Valle Crucis] abbey buildings tightly cropped. For good reason; it's to exclude the *real* view which greets the visitor: the huge Abbey Farm static caravan park, occupying a site twice the size of the abbey's [...] Early English meets Lego.⁶¹

The page that follows this quotation features a picture of a clearly abandoned caravan, upside down, with the abbey clearly visible in the background. The subversion works on two levels: it undermines the 'tightly cropped' and edited photographs of the abbey in local guide books, while also ironically alluding to the self-conscious constructed-ness of the *Real* project itself. The reality that Davies's encounters in Valle Crucis is one that is omitted from the guide books, and the abbey ruins are mirrored by those of the caravan. Davies's text is

⁶⁰ The sculpture is called 'A Private View', by Kevin Atherton
<<http://www.pmsa.org.uk/pmsa-database/11717/>>

⁶¹ Grahame Davies, *Real Wrexham* (Bridgend: Seren, 2007), p. 101. Emphasis my own. Future references to the text abbreviated as *RWX*.

thus reflective of a discursive space in which the reality of the ruins is acknowledged, and their metaphorical ruination reflected in the photograph of the caravan. Both levels draw attention to the way in which the reality that the tourist pamphlet seeks to represent is itself carefully constructed and controlled, and adherent to specific genre conventions that prevent a true representation of space. Davies's text exposes such conventions in order to ironically mimic and reconstruct them.

So, the *Real* series does not strive for a simple representation of space – a cataloguing of streets and places of interest – rather it strives to be a representational space in which place is rendered dynamically.⁶² Also, while clearly there is a reliance upon historical record in the *Real* series, there is also a distinct presentness and attention to the eradication of history. In this sense the *Real* series appears to be a reframing of the traditional travel guide, shaped according to 'postmodernist sensibilities'. Within the series, the textuality of Wales, or Wales as it is (or has been) written, is juxtaposed with accounts of the 'new', post-devolution Wales, in which text, image, and geography engage in a more active dialogue. The process is at once the democratisation of Wales's literary landscape (a movement away from the canonical), and its excavation.

De-bordering Debord's Psychogeography

A distinguishing factor of the *Real* series is that it is not driven so much by commercial concerns in a grant-aided culture as it is by a necessity to re-engage with space in a post-

⁶² Structurally, Finch's first instalment of *Real Cardiff* was 'internet-driven', an appropriate method by which to shed any entanglements with previous textual approaches to the city.

devolution Wales. If the intention of *Real Cardiff* was to address the way in which the writers had 'served' the city, then the *Real* series is ostensibly an extension of this project. As such, the commercial space the series occupies is something of an anomaly, positioned somewhere between travel writing and the guide book. It integrates local and (inter)national perspectives, and is as much a creative enterprise as it is a critical discourse. Mike Parker, who ceased his role as an active contributor to the *Rough Guide to Wales* years prior to taking the *Real Powys* commission, suggests that 'the tourist industry is something of a dilettante aimed at those whose interest is really only surface deep'.⁶³ Here Parker enunciates the unease he felt at the strict guidelines imposed on *Rough* authors (as a result perhaps of commercial necessity), and the negative effect this had on the depth to which his writing could engage with, and reflect on, the complexity of space. Parker accuses the tourist industry (of which the *Rough Guide* is clearly a part), of exclusively catering to an audience with a passing, superficial interest

This has significant ramifications for the *Real* project as it relates to other travel guides, suggesting that its approach differs significantly from that of the *Rough Guides*. The *Real* series' method of engagement is, in contrast to the *Rough Guide* formula, psychogeographical. Guy Debord, one of the first writers and theorists associated with the term, here illustrates a key aspect of psychogeography:

The production of psychogeographic maps, or even the introduction of alterations such as more or less arbitrarily transposing maps of two different regions, can contribute to clarifying certain wanderings that express not subordination to

⁶³ Mike Parker, personal communication, 12 March 2013.

randomness but complete *insubordination* to habitual influences.⁶⁴

For Debord, the map is a textual modality that allows a writer to become *insubordinate*, that is, to operate outside of the traditional parameters of the city through a deliberate disengagement with the ordered city space. Specifically, Debordian psychogeography is a literary modality that attempts to move beyond rhetoric and into the realms of deterministic scientific enquiry. The approach was not without its flaws, and as Merlin Coverley suggests in his book *Psychogeography*: '[Debord's] attempts to fashion psychogeography into a rigorous scientific discipline placed the methodology at odds with the subject of his investigation, as the subjective realm of human emotion remained stubbornly resistant to the objective mechanism he chose to employ'.⁶⁵ The series' geographical work, on which Finch and the other *Real* authors overlay their idiosyncratic methodology, was not originally conceived of as psychogeographic. Finch says that upon completing *Real Cardiff*:

I looked at [Will Self's *Psychogeography*] and saw great parallels between its structures and my own creative work down the years [...] This became a formula, a style, a book that we could get others to write.⁶⁶

Exporting his technique to other books in the series and producing a style guide for contributing authors to follow, Finch's project, although it did not begin as such, became

⁶⁴ Debord, 'Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography'.

⁶⁵ Merlin Coverley, *Psychogeography* (Herts: Pocket Essentials, 2010), p. 24.

⁶⁶ Peter Finch, personal communication, 19 March 2013. Finch is referring to Self's serialised column for the *Independent* newspaper, which began in 2003, and was compiled into book form - Will Self and Ralph Steadman, *Psychogeography* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007).

one that increasingly mirrored Debord's psychogeography. That is, while Finch's initial methodology only bore a somewhat coincidental resemblance to Self's overtly critically engaged psychogeographical project, the *Real* series' most striking resemblance to Debord's original project is in the application of Finch's method to other Welsh spaces. Thus, it is not the methodology itself in focus here, but rather its 'rolling out', from a centralised methodology (which is itself the work of a central figurehead), to other authors and places. Finch's voice is not merely present in his unique introductions to each *Real* volume; due to his Cardiff template, it resonates throughout each volume. However, although Finch presides over their publication, the individual subjectivity of each author predominates throughout each volume, which is essentially the dissolution of a range of subjective experiences into an objective methodology. Debord himself considered being local, or at least well-versed in a specific locale, an important factor in his psychogeographical writing. Jacqueline de Jong, once a collaborator with Debord, explains that '[Debord] had to show me [his local area of Paris], all of it in the greatest detail, he said, because this was his ambience, it was the ideal ambience of a city [...], this was his universe'.⁶⁷ Debord considered this so important that he granted De Jong the responsibility of leading the Dutch Situationists, saying to her 'you can take the Netherlands', although when she did publish her own *Situationist Times*, 'he didn't like it and I was out and that was that'.⁶⁸ In looking at the structure of each psychogeographical project – as well as Parker's defection from the Rough Guide – one can begin to see the anti-dilettantist parallels between the projects of Finch and Debord.

⁶⁷ Jacqueline de Jong, quoted in Andrew Hussey's *The Game of War: The Life and Death of Guy Debord* (London: Pimlico, 2002), p. 149.

⁶⁸ Ibid. p. 149.

The structure of the *Cardiff* books gives some indication of Finch's ad hoc methodology – as does the preface to the Newport volume above – reflecting journeys through adjacent micro-locales. As Finch writes: 'As ever, my method was to research, check the maps, then visit' (*RC2*, p. 7). The map forms a part of Finch's text mainly through this kind of implication, rather than an overt reliance. The spatial relationship between these micro-locales is rarely cartographically visible to the reader, as it would be in the kind of mini-map frequently used in a *Rough Guide*, for example. Occasionally the lines are blurred, as Finch writes in his introduction: '[t]he present book, of course, is not supposed to be read straight through. It's no novel and there's no sequential plot. You dip. You follow your interests' (*RC2*, p. 8). The expectation when encountering one of the texts in the *Real* series is that there is no narrative structure, but in its absence there is a topographical structure; the ordered, encountered 'space' delineates the sequence of the text; the sections are connected by the physical geographies that they both encounter and *perform*. That this journey is rarely visible in cartographic form serves to highlight the textual layering of a *Real* space. Various intertextual fictions, some of which will be explored later, are invoked intratextually when the place in which they purport to take place is encountered by the *Real* author. Consequently these fictions are removed from their original context and arranged in an explicitly cartographic way.⁶⁹ The text's topographical and spatial arrangement is embellished with excerpts from fiction, creating a 'deep' layering process akin to that of a map, and generating a hybrid space in which narrative, the temporal, is related through encounters with place, the spatial. In producing this exploratory space, Finch's *Cardiff* allows

⁶⁹ On the *Real Cardiff* website Finch displays a topographic vision of what such a map might look like; a place encountered through its writing in which local writers are represented by a number, for which a key is provided. The map, entitled 'Cardiff Poets Map', is available at <<http://www.peterfinch.co.uk/poetsmap.htm>>.

room for the reader's subjectivity ('follow your interests') to guide them through the text. In this way the reader is not confined to retrace Finch's footsteps, but invited to rearrange the text in their own way; the exploration of the text is a fragmented (and arguably, given that the reader's travel is virtual, rather than physical, more easily *fragmentable*), exploration of the city space. Invoking and enabling the reader's positionality in the text itself is a common method in the *Real* series. Finch, as the series' general editor, writes of Niall Griffiths's *Real Aberystwyth*: 'Essential reading if you live here and pretty good even if you don't'.⁷⁰ The positionality of the *Real* texts is foregrounded, acknowledging that the place in which they are read is as intrinsic to them as where they are written.⁷¹ Sheila Hones persuasively argues that the reading of a text is a spatial event. Integrating reader response theory into literary geography, Hones suggests that:

As reader and writer, you and I, we are currently sharing a moment of text-based interaction, a geographical event. We are engaged across distance, participating in an improvisation that is bringing together a broad array of people, places, times, contexts, networks, and communities.⁷²

Taking Griffiths's *Real Aberystwyth* as an example, the textual space is not simply

⁷⁰ Peter Finch's introduction to Niall Griffiths's *Real Aberystwyth* (Bridgend: Seren, 2008), p. 9.

⁷¹ Similar quotations on *Real Cardiff* can be found on Finch's website: 'A wealth of information on the significance of familiar sites for those who live in Cardiff and an interesting insight into Wales' capital for those who don't', Cathryn Scott, *The Big Issue* (December 2002); 'This book should be read by anyone who wants to get to know more about Cardiff. That should include most people in Wales for a start. Even the ones in places like Swansea, Aberystwyth and Caernarfon', Raymond Humphreys, *Cambrensis* 55 (April 2003), <http://www.peterfinch.co.uk/cardiff_revs.htm>.

⁷² Sheila Hones, 'Text as it Happens: Literary Geography', *Geography Compass*, 2.5 (2008), pp. 1301-1317, 1301.

representative of a single material space (in this case, Aberystwyth). The geographical event is a liminal event that traverses boundaries, and thus the textual Aberystwyth is not only a representation of a material space but an experience that must also take into account the reader's own position. In this sense, the text does not (and cannot) fix space because the way in which space is produced is itself continuous, and affected by a variety of contexts (as listed by Hones above). The 'real Aberystwyths', we are told, 'are as many... as there are inhabitants,' '[it] is what you make of it; it supplies the materials, and what you build with them is entirely up to you' (RA, p. 12).⁷³ The subjectivity of representation is heralded as its realness. The material geography of Aberystwyth is evidently related to the materiality of the text's construction.

Fiction in the Real Series

One of the primary modalities of the *Real* series that differentiates it from Debordian psychogeography, is the intertextual invocation of other texts. I shall look at three particular instances, in *Real Powys*, *Real Aberystwyth*, and *Real Wrexham*. These texts explore the ways in which fictional representations engage dialogically with geographical space. Sheila Hones, in a discussion of Colum McCann's novel *Let the Great World Spin*, argues that such instances of intertextuality might be conceptualised in terms of Edward Soja's 'third space'. The section is worth quoting in full:

The concept of a 'literary space' does not have to be 'metaphorical'. Here the

⁷³ There are parallels between the plurality of Aberystwyths and the many 'Welshnesses' identified by Osmond.

approach to literary space is made by concentrating on issues of intertextuality [...] [T]he intertextual references to other New York novels mean that many fictional and factual New Yorks are copresent in the text event of *The Great World*. In other words, this chapter expands the discussion of *The Great World's* literary geography by moving from the intratextual – the coherence and connectedness of the space of the fictional world – to the intertextual and extratextual, and the connectedness not only of literary space but also of literary and material space. In this way, it collapses the literal-metaphorical space binary and reorganizes it into a version of what the geographer Edward Soja has termed *third space*.⁷⁴

To suggest that the *Real* series is 'connected' to the fictional representations of the spaces it discusses is not to suggest that this connection is somehow coherent or universal. The series deploys fictions in a variety of ways, sometimes reverential, but frequently ironic. The dislocation between the *real* space and the fictional one is often substantial, and the series frequently problematizes the inter-relationship between fictional and metaphorical space by referring to other non-fictional representations of space. Soja's *thirdspace* is a necessary corrective that can accommodate an ever-increasing number of representations of space.

In *Real Powys*, Mike Parker writes of the ambiguity between fiction and reality:

Is it real? Not entirely [...] [the people] must all be in the other Rhulen, the one invented by Bruce Chatwin [in his novel *On the Black Hill*]. Right now though, it's

⁷⁴ Sheila Hones, *Literary Geographies: Narrative Space in Let the Great World Spin* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 13.

hard to say which one actually exists.⁷⁵

Chatwin's Rhulen is a fictional place that bears little relation to the one that Parker encounters, but the border between its topographical, material, reality and its fiction is blurred and displaced; Parker acknowledges the division between 'invented' and 'real' to be a false dichotomy, and his difficulty in separating the two echoes Soja's thirdspace. Earlier Parker writes of his 'topographic dislocation' (*RP*, p. 34), a feeling that is engendered by the weight of expectation that encountering a textual place prior to perceiving it can place on a visitor, recalling Tally's assertion about 'reading about others' experiences' (as well as Hogan's experience of Machen's 'hidden tavern'). In fact, Chatwin's version of Rhulen appears as a subversive presence in Parker's text, in which he writes that 'the true place is a photographic negative of Chatwin's Rhulen' (*RP*, p. 46). Parker also writes of architectural fictions, in his Powys volume, using notably Baudrillardian terminology:

The county town of modern Powys [Llandrindod Wells] is pure hallucination [...] Will pushing open the door of a shop send the whole simulacrum tumbling, a domino effect of shammery? (*RP*, p. 21)

Llandrindod may have avoided the pitfalls of 'misty Celtic pastiche', but it appears that its architecture plunders Victorian themes. From the restored 'cast-iron verandas', to the spa that has been 'brought back to some kind of life', Llandrindod appears like a town full of undead Victoriana (*RGTW*, p. 256). 'Lovers' Leap', described by Parker as 'a re-created bit of Victorian nonsense that's just a fake cliff with mediocre views over the river' (*RGTW*, p.

⁷⁵ Mike Parker, *Real Powys* (Bridgend: Seren, 2011), pp. 46-8.

257), echoes Parker's vision of a 'tumbling' simulacrum. *Real Powys*, a text that eschews maps as a visual presence, opens up a dialogue between text and place, in which the map features as a recursive echo. The map is a fundamental part of Parker's methodology. As Parker writes, with a distinct echo of an introductory phrase in Finch's *Real Cardiff Two* ('[a]s ever, my method was to research, check the maps, then visit'), writes: 'As ever, it started with a map' (*RP*, p. 11). The irony of Parker's representation of *Powys* is intensified by the fact that, regardless of its cartographical dominance in maps of Wales, no map is included in *Real Powys*.

In contrast to Parker's allusion to Chatwin's *Rhulen* (which does not quote significantly from Chatwin's text), Griffiths's *Real Aberystwyth* quotes the following passage from Malcolm Pryce's *Aberystwyth Mon Amour*, a surreal, noir-fiction re-interpretation of the town, to describe the strangeness of Castle Point, located along the town's seafront:

[...] [the] promenade turns sharply as if on a hinge. After that the town takes on a different character: an exposed, wind-beaten strip leading down to the harbour with a down-at-heel air where life seems a constant battle with discarded newspapers flying in the wind.⁷⁶

Griffiths glibly adds to Pryce's description: 'Aberystwyth's promenade is very, very long' (*RA*, p. 103). Pryce's more overtly 'literary' description is not without its basis in a real, encountered reality: the promenade does 'turn sharply', the wind is noticeably stronger, the 'discarded newspapers' are most likely a reference to discarded fish and chip wrappers.

⁷⁶ Malcolm Pryce, *Aberystwyth Mon Amour* (London: Bloomsbury, 2002), p. 39.

However, there is another layer to Pryce's fiction that can perhaps be viewed as his particular authorial positionality. The novel from which Griffiths quotes was written entirely in Bangkok (where Pryce lived from 2000-2007), the 'different character' of the town is in fact a memorialised, imagined version (and one recognisably of the 1980s). Pryce's *Aberystwyth* is very much 'imagined', which is not to say that is less real than Griffiths's description. The geographical markers and waypoints of Pryce's noir-ish Aberystwyth are present in Griffiths's *Real Aberystwyth* and *vice versa*, although Pryce's version has clearly had an impact on the town itself. As Finch remarks in *Real Wales*: 'the louche trollops of the town, despite Malcolm Pryce, do not wear stove pipe hats. The druids don't run the milk bars. I couldn't find the whelk stores' (*Real Wales*, pp. 131-2). The *Real* series insists upon the relationship between the real and the imagined, and difficulty in reconciling one with the other.

Griffiths's use of another writer's fiction of Aberystwyth is significant. The inclusion of Pryce's prose represents here entirely what the *Real* series is attempting to accomplish: to combine self-consciously fictional representations of place with a travel narrative. It has echoes of the *Rough Guide's* assertion that Wales' brutality is the essence of its reality: '[w]ind-beaten', 'down-at-heel', 'constant battle', all descriptions that are foreshadowed in Griffiths's preface: 'jealousy and resentment [...] are allowed to seethe', 'ugly shapes', 'the cruciform shape of a kite circling a leafless tree' (*RA*, p. 12). The bleeding between fictional and non-fictional modalities echoes Parker's 'topographic dislocation'. The *Real Aberystwyth* constructed by Griffiths is the product of location and its textual re-playings; the celebratory intertextual weaving of discursive spaces, and the rendering of what Tally

and Westphal refer to as 'a pluralistic image of the place'.⁷⁷

In *Real Wrexham*, Davies visits the remains of Castell Dinas Brân, a site of some significance in Welsh mythology given that it is named after Bendigeidfran (Brân the Blessed), and was also 'the place where Sir Galahad finally finds the Holy Grail' (*RWX*, p. 107). It was also 'destroyed by Edward I in 1277 and never rebuilt' (*RWX*, p. 108). Given that Davies's own encounter with the site is simply as it appears in front of him (in ruins), he quotes an extended passage from John Cowper Powys's *Owen Glendower*.⁷⁸ However, the passage from which Davies quotes doesn't provide an overt description about the ruins of Dinas Brân, rather it describes the split between the imagined and real place:

All the while he had been approaching the real Dinas Brân, the other, that mystical one which he had created in his childhood, had kept blending with it. [...] [But now] these two Dinas Brân's *separated completely*. The imaginary one lifted itself clean out of this draughty mad-house of broken stones.⁷⁹

Following this passage, Davies suggests that the view from Dinas Brân 'is enough to make even someone with a monochrome materialist imagination see what made this place appealing to princes, novelists, and the makers of myths' (*RWX*, p. 109). The 'broken stones' that clearly underwhelm Cowper Powys's character Rhisiart in the passage above don't warrant a photograph in Davies's book, and neither do they receive a significant amount of

⁷⁷ *Geocriticism*, p. x.

⁷⁸ John Cowper Powys, *Owen Glendower* (Oxfordshire: Walcott Books, 2002).

⁷⁹ A passage from John Cowper Powys, *Owen Glendower* (edition not cited), in *Real Wrexham*, p. 108.

textual attention. In quoting the passage from Cowper Powys's novel, Davies emphasises the difference between the real and the imaginary space, but makes a further distinction between the imagination of a novelist such as the mythology-obsessed Powys and what he calls a 'monochrome materialist imagination'. Davies's distinction between different kinds of imagination suggests a nuanced naturalisation of the image of the ruins, and the language he uses distinctly echoes Soja's description of *thirdspace*: the combination the Firstspace of the "'real" material world"' and the 'Secondspace perspective that interprets this reality through "imagined" representations of spatiality'.⁸⁰ The distinction Davies appears to be referring to is the difference between fictional and non-fictional representation of space. However, such distinctions are rendered unstable by the *Real* project, given that both, regardless of veracity, are variant registers of what Lefebvre refers to as 'representations of space'. Furthermore, as Hones argues, *thirdspace* prompts the collapse of the 'literal-metaphorical space binary'. Davies's distinction between fictional (imaginary) and non-fictional (materialist) representations of space inscribes the space binary that Cowper Powys's text itself renders unstable, resulting in the metaphorical 'separation' of the real from the imaginary. In doing so Davies's text recursively implicates itself in the process of collapse. The separation of the imaginary from the real is similar to the previous instance in Davies's Valle Crucis. However, in that instance the real (or at least a representation of space that is averred as a closer representation of reality) is forcibly re-imposed on the preferable 'fiction' propagated by commercial guide books. In subverting the traditional guidebook, the psychogeographical project of the *Real* series exposes its overtly commercial aspirations. The literal reframing of the photograph of Valle Crucis is

⁸⁰ Edward Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p. 6.

echoed by the textual reframing of Dinas Brân.

Countermapping the 'Real'

There is, as referred to above, a paucity of actual maps in the *Real* series; the consequence, perhaps, of a conscious decision to omit one of the defining modalities of other travel guides in order to differentiate the series from its competitors. By virtue of its general omission, however, the map grows in significance. The usefulness of a traditional travel guide is often predicated on its use of maps, exemplified by the *Lonely Planet* guides, which are often published with an inbuilt compass. Perhaps it is the specificity of a map – its deterministic qualities – that is troubling for the *Real* project. Mike Parker, who has written extensively about his obsession with maps, suggests that their relative absence from the *Real* series improves the experience of the *real* place:⁸¹

These days especially, it is so easy to shove a name into Google and find numerous maps [...] Give them [the reader] a map, and they might over-rely on it (in the same way that people at beauty spots spend longer looking at the interpretation board/map than they do the actual view).⁸²

The *Real* series continually erases textual borders between poetry, prose, fiction, and photography. However, Parker suggests two reasons for the relative lack of maps. First, that

⁸¹ See Mike Parker, *Map Addict* (London: Harper Collins, 2010).

⁸² Mike Parker, personal communication, 12 March 2013.

modern technology renders the guidebook map less relevant, a further result of what David Harvey has referred to as 'time-space compression'. Where Harvey suggest that innovations in transport 'annihilate space through time', further innovations in communication technology such as those alluded to by Parker render this compression more pronounced.⁸³ Second, that the map itself is a barrier to experience, and that it becomes an object on which a tourist might rely, and one that will consequently influence their experience of the place. The absence of maps in the series' other volumes is reflective of its substantially different intentions. The index of *Real Cardiff Two*, which includes the original maps discussed above, refers to a third map entitled 'Greater Cardiff' that doesn't actually appear in the volume (either on page 22 as specified or elsewhere). Tony Curtis's volume *Real South Pembrokeshire* doesn't contain any maps, and although the Landsker is referenced on the opening page of Finch's introduction, it only receives a single mention in Curtis's own text.

When maps are included, in Finch's *Real Cardiff Two* for example, they are overlaid with his own sketches such as 'A Map of the Old Town Walls' (*RC2*, p. 69) and 'Probable Route of the [river] Canna' (*RC2*, p. 89), which render cartography pluralised, palimpsestic, local, oppositional, and resistant to traditional mapping techniques that would render space as fixed.⁸⁴ Finch notes the absence of existing maps of the Canna, and the continual failure of contemporary cartographers (and potential commercial tourist signposting) to mark its 'probable' route, stating: '[b]ut of the Canna [...] and its mythical bridge. Not a sign' (*RC2*, p. 89). The map Finch creates is a 'counter-map'; a kind of map that, as Walford Davies

⁸³ David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), p. 241.

⁸⁴ This is also a technique used by Jenkins in *Real Swansea*, when he superimposes Swansea's medieval streets onto a modern map, p. 86. Finch also uses this technique in his 'Cardiff Poets Map', which plots the locations of various local poets onto a map of the city, <<http://www.peterfinch.co.uk/poetsmap.htm>>

contends, can be the articulation of ‘the individual subject or political dissident’.⁸⁵ Finch’s counter-map is reminiscent of the proto-psychogeographical writer Arthur Machen’s gothic short story, *A Fragment of Life*. The story’s protagonist, Edward Darnell, responds to his wife’s enquiry into his late-night wanderings in London: ‘I had the tour all right. I didn’t buy a map; that would have spoilt it, somehow; to see everything plotted out, and named and measured [...] I made a map’.⁸⁶ The various *Real* authors appear to echo Darnell’s wariness of the map as a sole means of encountering space; Debord’s advocacy of psychogeographical ‘insubordination’ here applies not simply to physical geography but to its many (flawed) representations, creating a significant parallel between Darnell’s (or Machen’s) psychogeographical approach and that of the contributors to the series. The visual (or non-textual) sign is not entirely absent however, as evidenced by the vast array of photographs included in each guide, with subjects ranging from architecture to graffiti (which itself varies between mundanity, profanity, and sloganeering, but is in all cases an act of writing in/on place).

Analysing the internal organisation of space within these texts, and of the various ways in which text is displaced and rendered relational, either through the inclusion of photographs or the frequent poetic excursions, is a valuable way of elucidating the *Real* series’ cartographic project. The series methodology is paradoxically both objective, in that it is templated and kept in-line with central guidelines created by Finch, but guided by individual, authorial subjectivity. David Barne, in a review of Finch’s *Real Cardiff*, writes that ‘we gradually realise [*Real Cardiff*] is not simply a brilliant guidebook but the moving

⁸⁵ Davies, *Cartographies of Culture*, p. 12.

⁸⁶ Arthur Machen, ‘A Fragment of Life’, in *The White People and Other Weird Stories* (London, Penguin, 2011), p. 179.

autobiography of a poet'.⁸⁷ This quotation could be applied to many of the volumes in the series, which, although striving for some degree of objectivity (at least in their use of a central style-guide), also subvert the customary presentation of the guidebook. In this sense, while maps may be absent from a number of the volumes, the series provides an effective textual counter-map, that in its celebration of heterogeneous places provides an effective riposte to the 'divided' map.

A Real Prose Poem

Mike Parker's anecdote about tourists who look at the map at a beauty spot rather than the view in front of them succinctly illustrates the way in which a dependence upon Secondspace narratives might intrude upon the experience of the real encountered environment (Firstspace). On the one hand a map might make a reader aware of the fact that it is a 'representation of space' in a variety of ways (such as its two-dimensionality and scale, echoing Alfred Korzybski's famous remark: 'the map is not the territory').⁸⁸ However, a poem cannot depend upon the science that supports the idea of the map as a useful rendering of space. Veronica Forrest-Thomson's statement succinctly captures the positional relationship of poetry to prose, and is particularly applicable to the *Real* series.

If we take language as the mediating agent between consciousness and the external world, then poetry is the form of language that makes this notion explicit by

⁸⁷ David Barne, from www.gwales.com, available on
<http://www.peterfinch.co.uk/cardiff_revs.htm>

⁸⁸ Alfred Korzybski, *Science and Sanity: An Introduction to Non-Aristotelian Systems and General Semantics*, fifth edition (New York: Institute of General Semantics, 1994), p. 58.

stressing form as relevant to meaning, and thus making us aware of the medium before we have fixed on the experience, world, reality, that is being mediated.⁸⁹

To extend Forrest-Thomson's argument into cartography, the *Real* series' inclusion of poetry among other modalities such as maps, photography and autobiography, introduces a subversive element to the series' representation of reality. Either it suggests that poetry is an equally useful method for representing space, or that space itself cannot be represented by one method alone. Soja's *thirdspace*, and its recognition of the discursive relationship between representation and place (which might in this sense be akin to the form/content binary), thus provides a critical mechanism with which we might understand the *Real* series' relationship with cartography. Its multifocalized approach might thus be seen as the series' resistance to strategic, totalising forces. This street-level resistance was identified as the tactic of the walker by Michel De Certeau, who refers to the 'long poem of walking': '[t]he long poem of walking manipulates spatial organizations, no matter how panoptic they may be [...] It creates shadows and ambiguities within them. It inserts multitudinous references and citations into them'.⁹⁰ In rendering place as multifocalized the *Real* series emphasises and recreates the ambiguity identified by Certeau, and their poetic resistance to closure (or 'fixing the experience') potentially mirror the resistance to strategic 'spatial organisations'.

Nigel Jenkins, in his overtly poetic framing of his first contribution to the series, *Real Swansea* (2008), destabilises the relational aspect of prose to poetry as well as subverting

⁸⁹ Veronica Forrest-Thomson, 'Rational Artifice: Some Remarks on the Poetry of William Empson', in *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 4 (1974), 225-238, p. 235.

⁹⁰ De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 101.

expectations of the travel guide genre.⁹¹ The opening lines of the poem 'Borders', which is the opening of *Real Swansea*, are 'What begins for you/ where the waves break' (RS, p. 14); lines that mark Jenkins' transitory geographical and textual starting point. Jenkins's final poem, entitled 'Poem of the good settler' – 'Came for a day:/ setlo am oes' (RS, p. 204) – encapsulates the personal journey that has been undertaken. The final lines of *Real Swansea* resist closure, translating as 'stayed for life'.⁹² *Real Swansea*, like several other *Real* texts including Finch's, is paradoxically a framed narrative, as well as one through which a reader follows their interests. Jenkins's final short poem appeared in a different form prior to the *Real* publication, inscribed on a building in Christina Street (in Swansea), ironically giving it a certain precedence over the *Real* version, and also creating a complex interplay between the textual and the 'real'. The original final line differs from the one quoted above, and appears as 'setlo ar fyw'n fodlon', for which Jenkins provides his own translation of 'stayed to live contentedly'. However, in the alternate (first) version, the word 'setlo' (to settle) punningly shifts in meaning, no longer referring to the act of settling, but rather the decision to stay ('*decided* to live contentedly').⁹³ In this way the text enacts its own cultural space, in which Jenkins's own translation of his text performs a bordered, linguistic ambiguousness. *Real Swansea's* mercurial endnote is not uncommon in the series; Finch ends *Real Cardiff Two* with the poem 'Cardiff Could Be:', a list poem which Finch begins by noting various Cardiffs throughout the world, ending with the lines: 'Suburb of

⁹¹ Nigel Jenkins, *Real Swansea* (Bridgend: Seren, 2008).

⁹² Jenkins' own translation, as it appears on his website, is 'stayed a lifetime', <<http://www.nigeljenkins.com/poetrypublic.htm>>.

⁹³ Translation also taken from Jenkins' website. I am indebted to Damian Walford Davies for alerting me to this (slight) mistranslation.

Bristol/ Dark side of the moon/ Sands of Mars' (RC2, p. 195).⁹⁴ Finch's poem, in deliberately expansive style, gestures beyond one Cardiff to many, plural, Cardiffs; to spaces *in space*.

Finch's most recent book in the series, *Real Cardiff Three*, ends in prose rather than poetry; the text becoming more poetically staccato and notational:

When I get back I check Thompson's book. Fitzhamon invaded by boat. Landed near Newport. Brought his force in and was once again the Founder. Hic jacet Robertus Filius Haymonis hujus loci fundator, records Leland. Bound to be right (RC3, p. 213).

Finch emphasises his methodological 'de-bordering' of Cardiff, frequently alternating between textual modes both linguistic (English/Welsh/Latin), and formal (poetry/prose), as well as visual (photography/cartography). In this passage, Finch incorporates different voices and modalities, resisting a singular interpretation and encouraging close attention to the shift in styles and registers. The text shifts into prose poetry, frequently drifting into overtly poetic sections not specifically delineated (by line breaks or titles, for example). In doing so Finch emphasises the plurality of both textual space and lived-in place, and in Thacker's terms, reconnects the representational space of his text with the material one that it depicts.⁹⁵ The movement through different textual and visual registers becomes an insistence that Cardiff, and indeed any space, can be represented only through such plural strategies.

⁹⁴ Other examples include Niall Griffiths, who ends *Real Aberystwyth* with the words '[t]hey never returned. Mouth of the very twisting river' (*Real Abersytwyth*, p. 168).

⁹⁵ Another example of Finch's prose poetry is found in *Real Cardiff Three*, which begins with a framed prose poem entitled 'Cardiff Walking', (*Real Cardiff Three*, p. 14).

Similarly, in Jenkins's *Real Swansea*, paragraphs of prose are frequently interspersed with original poetry, the former outweighing the latter in terms of volume. The longer poems are usually framed by a title, alerting the reader to a change in style and, consequently, managing expectations. Frequently, however, and without introduction, Jenkins embellishes his text with verse, predominantly tercets. The poetry serves several purposes: it provides a counterpoint to Jenkins's prose, as well as furnishing the text with autobiographical reflection. Also, they intratextually echo other sections of the text. Six pages after the titled poem 'Winos' appears (*RS*, p. 88), a three-line verse ('winos a tip-toe') appears after a passage on 'aspects of city centre hedonism' (*RS*, p. 94). This meandering narration is predicated on movement by the author and also on the reader's movement back and forth within the internal space of the text. The repetitive modal switching between prose and poetry deliberately destabilises a reader's engagement with the space of the text and the geographical space 'outside'. Spatially, the formal elements of the text are different and changing, but the geographical space is often rendered dually, in prose and poetry; those who appear in verse as 'winos' are depicted in prose as the rather more prosaic 'young revellers' (*RS*, p. 94). The titles of the poems, and their frequent absence, are not simply metaphorical signposts; they affect and underscore the materiality of the text. The text inscribes movement, but the spatial movement is not rendered cartographically (as Thacker has suggested is the standard for travel writing). Rather, space is rendered stylistically and syntactically, by a fluidity of movement between prose and poetry.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ Albeit Thacker is writing of 'traditional' travel writing: 'The obvious examples of these spatial texts are those of travel writing, within which there is a long tradition of maps as frontispieces or illustrations.' ('Critical Literary Geography', p. 64).

The spaces *of* Jenkins's text, in this case the visual impact created by the deployment of poetry and prose, paradoxically serve to problematise space as well as resist the essentialist view that asserts that a text can be representative of a truth. Thus, how space is rendered into text in the *Real* series is deliberately palimpsestic. As Saunders notes:

While the weaving of the real into the imaginary can maintain the authenticity and plausibility of the former through linguistic presentation, it is distorted by the discourse of the imaginary, which seeks to convey meaning within a particular overarching narrative structure.⁹⁷

The *Real* series satirises the discourse of the 'real', and further subverts the positivism of the travel guide by ironically interpreting its conventions. While the individual volumes in the *Real* series do not contain 'fictional' narratives, the spaces that the texts explore engender a narrative locomotion. In this locomotion, the generic conventions of the text are made to adapt to the 'real', encountered geography. It is in *encountering* the text's 'positionality' that a readerly element not exclusive to fiction is opened up. Here the 'levels of engagement' of Saunders's positionality are particularly important; acknowledging the problems of representation and semantic coding encountered in all written modes of language necessitates the acknowledgment of the 'motivations' of the reader as well as the writer. If the travel guide can be seen to be part of a tradition that has claims to empiricism, it must be pointed out that this empiricism contains 'powers' and 'motivations' of its own. These powers, and the resistance to them, can be understood more generally within the political and social consciousness of the UK in the wake of the devolution referendum. The

⁹⁷ (Widdowson, 1975; Lodge, 1979); Saunders, 'Reforging the Connections', p. 439.

panoptic 'divided' map, for instance, is a typical empiricist distillation of this consciousness.

However, as alluded to by Peter Finch, the visible changes in Cardiff were manifestations of a twofold strategy that reflected both the political shift engendered by devolution (such as the new Assembly buildings), as well as the UK-wide economic boom that provided the climate for large scale regenerative developments (such as those seen in the Cardiff Bay area).

Real Capitalism

In *Real Swansea*, Nigel Jenkins reflects the commercialisation of the Swansea Bay area in a short, haiku-like poem:

tide in, skiers out
– dollar signs carved
from shore to shore⁹⁸

The carved signs can be read as metaphorically emblematic of the commercialisation of Swansea Bay. The 'skiers', bringing with them an increase in tourist revenue to the popular Mumbles area, carve a shallow, temporary mark into the bay area. The short poem is surrounded by Jenkins's prose introduction to the area, in which he likens the picturesque bay to 'the edge of a lake in Switzerland', as well as quoting Walter Savage Landor's

⁹⁸ *Real Swansea*, p. 22.

reflection: 'The Gulf of Salerno, I hear, is much finer than Naples; but give me Swansea for scenery and climate'.⁹⁹ Microcosmically, Jenkins's short poem evokes the personal bitterness felt at witnessing a changing landscape (he was a Mumbles resident; this is his *ambience*), but more succinctly it captures the multi-layered problem of rendering a place through the medium of language. The poem itself does not position itself in Swansea Bay, the particular site of reconstruction; rather, the reader is invited to position it given the contextual prose that surrounds it. Immediately before the poem, Jenkins's places his readers at a particular vantage, and a particular time: 'If you stand at Mumbles when the tide's in' (*RS*, p. 22), the phrase 'tide's in' appearing in the first line of the poem, further anchoring the poem to the same place as the prose introduction. Once more, as can be found in the 'winos' section discussed previously, Jenkins's text contains a subjective palimpsest of geographic experience. The shifting geography of the shoreline can be read as a metaphor for the variation between different modes of poetry and prose, but when viewed in conjunction with the 'dollar signs carved' in the sea, it is not only the commercial practices of property development and tourism (given greater credence by the use of 'dollars', which, it is assumed, are not spent by the locals), that are implicated. It is the *Real* series itself, and its own commercialised/commodified vision of space.

The *Real* Series beyond Wales

The importance of the discourse of devolution to the *Real* project is particularly evident in

⁹⁹ The earliest mention of Landor's words I have been able to locate is in John Forster's *Walter Savage Landor: A Biography, Volume 2* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1869), p. 133.

the three volumes whose *dérives* are conducted outside Wales: Niall Griffiths's second contribution to the series, *Real Liverpool* (2008), Nicholas Murray's *Real Bloomsbury* (2010), and *Real South Bank* by Chris McCabe (2016).¹⁰⁰ In the inclusion of English locations, the *Real* series problematises any prescriptive notion of its national space. Both Liverpool and Bloomsbury have historical Welsh connections, but neither volume explicitly identifies this as the sole reason for these volumes' incorporation into the series. In his introduction to *Real Liverpool*, Peter Finch addresses the Welsh perception of Liverpool: 'Wales might imagine that this place is capital of the mountainous north but that's not a Liverpool perception' (*RL*, p. 9). Liverpool's Welshness, a result of its historically 'leaky and ill-defined border' (*RL*, p. 9), is cast as its Celticity, as Griffiths suggests in his discussion of Wallasey (derived from the Anglo-Saxon for 'Island of the Welsh'): 'The Celtic-ness of Liverpool will continue to run throughout these pages, but whilst we're on the Welsh island here we might as well discuss Liverpool's Welshness.'¹⁰¹ Liverpool's 'Celtic' heritage is a result of immigration from both Ireland and Wales; however, it appears that the 'Liverpool perception' aligns itself more readily with its Irishness. Griffiths remarks: '[i]n Ireland, I've heard Liverpool called "East Ireland"; in Ireland, I've heard Ireland called "West Liverpool"' (*RL*, p. 191). This 'Celtic-ness' is also characterised as an erosion of any definitive Englishness, which stands in contrast to Finch's rendering of post-devolution Cardiff. Following on from Finch's initial assertion that 'Liverpool has a fair idea that it isn't quite England' (*RL*, p. 9), Griffiths notes 'an air of belligerently run-down Englishness [in Wallasey]; St George's flags being used as curtains on windows opaque with muck' (*RL*, p. 135). The ironic portrayal of flags being used to cover up dirt contrasts with the Ddraig Gochs flying in

¹⁰⁰ Niall Griffiths, *Real Liverpool* (Bridgend: Seren, 2008); Nicholas Murray, *Real Bloomsbury* (Bridgend: Seren, 2010).

¹⁰¹ Griffiths, *Real Liverpool*, p. 135.

Finch's *Real Cardiff*. Wallasey, in contrast to the portrayal of Liverpool as a whole, is discussed as an outpost of Welshness, given its traditional association with one of its most famous sons, poet and dramatist (and a key influence on Jan Morris' vision of Wales), Saunders Lewis. In conversation with another Welsh-language Liverpool resident, Dr D. Ben Rees, a retired Welsh minister at Penny Lane church, the politicisation of Liverpool's Welsh identity appears less of an issue. Griffiths writes that 'for him [Rees] the borders are porous and pellucid; [...] he feels "rooted in both places [...] Devolution never meant that you had to build a wall"' (*RL*, pp. 135-6).

Although Griffiths discusses Liverpool's Welshness, as a subject within *Real Liverpool* it does not dominate the text. While the aims of the *Real* series are neither prescriptive nor proscriptive, any perceptibly nationalistic 'claiming' of territory would appear discordant with the Wales-based books that constitute the majority of the series. While acknowledging the Welsh heritage still visible in certain parts of Liverpool today, the text's own internal space affords it relatively little attention. In his *Aberystwyth* volume Griffiths acknowledges the problematic, porous nature of nationality, and displaying elements of his text's positionality, states that '[Aberystwyth] isn't in my blood – I wasn't born here, and the Cymric stuff in my blood has bled out from north Wales, not mid – but it's on my skin' (*RA*, p. 11). Griffiths elevates the textual place above the geographical (as can be seen in his own, stylised interpretation of Aberystwyth), an expression that is reinforced in an interview with Paul Farley, Liverpool resident and poet:

A kid from Netherley writing poetry? 'It's squatting'. So why poetry, then, particularly? Why not prose? He doesn't believe in the prose he writes, he says [...] 'I

know where I am with organised poetry, and lyric verse. I like shape and symmetry, all those things that Netherley didn't have'. (RL, p. 97)

Farley's poetry appears alien to its geographical source, evoking a sense of temporariness ('squatting'); othering himself and his text provides a textual counter-map of Netherley, and in doing so the positionality of Farley's text, and the spectre of Farley's authorial voice within his text, becomes problematised. Resisting geographical space, and reinforcing the textuality of place, is a defining characteristic of the *Real* series. Farley's 'symmetrical' rendering of Netherley, a place that he suggests is resistant to such organisation, is a process of counter-mapping similar to Finch's map of the Canna in Cardiff, or Griffiths's use of Pryce's description of Castle Point in Aberystwyth, and likewise Parker's experience of Chatwin's Rhulen versus his own.

Although the publication of Griffiths's volume on Liverpool was effective in relativising the *Real* series within a larger UK-wide topography, Nicholas Murray's *Real Bloomsbury* further dispels any notion of the series as nationally introspective. Bloomsbury's London location, lacking the more neighbourly status of Liverpool, gestures further away from the geographically Welsh focus of the series, while aligning it more closely with the project's psychogeographical core.¹⁰² Psychogeography is historically associated with the city, or urban, space; Merlin Coverley suggests that '[Psychogeography's] history of ideas is also a tale of two cities, London and Paris'.¹⁰³ In his *Bloomsbury dérive*, Nicholas Murray urges a

¹⁰² *Real* series is certainly the preferred term, perhaps due to Finch's nationwide volume entitled *Real Wales* (Bridgend: Seren, 2008), the year in which the first topographically English volume, Griffiths's *Real Liverpool*, was released.

¹⁰³ Coverley, *Psychogeography*, p. 11.

reader to '[t]hink of this book as a stroll around an area that can be covered (and has been many times in the writing of it) entirely on foot: I hope you enjoy the walk' (*RB*, p. 12). Murray's guide is overtly, methodologically, psychogeographical, and explicitly draws the reader's attention to the text's connection with the space in which it is produced. However, for a text that engages with a place famous for housing the Bloomsbury Group of artists, writers, and philosophers, as well as the old offices of Faber and Faber, Murray's text does not rely on these as a primary source, preferring

old guidebooks and histories, which are often as silly and eccentric as those of today but also often informative in surprising ways. Take John Murray's *Handbook to London As It Is* (1879), an early attempt at *Real London*.¹⁰⁴

Murray attempts to render Bloomsbury *as it is*. While acknowledging its history as a productive and important literary site, Murray recognises the importance to the *Real* project of producing a guide that does not rely on previous renderings. A focus of Murray's work, in true psychogeographical fashion, is the often occluded locations within Bloomsbury. As Murray writes on St Pancras' church:

When you pull off the shelves one of those glossy picture books with titles like *London's Churches* usually only this and St. George's Bloomsbury get a mention, as it they were the only two Bloomsbury churches in existence.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Murray, *Real Bloomsbury*, p. 30. Murray's *Modern London; Or, London As It Is*, 1st ed. (1851), is available in a digitized format at <http://archive.org/details/murrayshandbookf00john>.

¹⁰⁵ Murray, *Real Bloomsbury*, p. 26.

Murray is acutely aware that a psychogeographical account of Bloomsbury should not only be insubordinate to its built environment, but also to its textual history. The *Real* series differs from many contemporary guides because it does not 'sell' places such as particular restaurants or museums. The inclusion of sites that are typically not featured in other guidebooks is a method that sets the series apart from its competition; in deference to the series' psychogeographical roots, *Real Bloomsbury* is not a book, it is a walk.

As Saunders rightly points out, some literary voices are 'more audible than others'. Murray writes that '[t]he petering out of Gray's Inn Road at its northern end into traffic and scruffiness makes me want to start my exploration of eastern Bloomsbury from scratch' (*RB*, p. 107), emphasising that the *dérive*'s emphasis on objectivity is not always conducive to literariness. Murray's self-commentary emphasises this potential pitfall, an inherent problem that places psychogeographical wanderings at odds with the 'literary', as Coverley points out:

[it has been contended that] Debord's principle [of the *dérive*] is nearer to a military strategy and has its roots [...] in military tactics [...] In this light, the *dérive* becomes a strategic device for reconnoitring the city.¹⁰⁶

The strategy of the *dérive* is one that can be traced through Finch and Debord (and Iain Sinclair) to earlier traditions of the writer-walker. In accordance with the formal approach of the psychogeographical *dérive*, Murray doesn't retrace his steps or alter the representation

¹⁰⁶ Coverley, *Psychogeography*, pp. 96-7.

of his walk along Gray's Inn Road, resulting in a disciplined, rather than meandering, account.

Interesting patterns also emerge when tracing the historic representations of local *dérives*. Murray's Gray's Inn Road, for example, stands in stark contrast to Arthur Machen's, as it appeared in a volume of his autobiography entitled *Things Near and Far* (1923):

[...] he who cannot find wonder, mystery, awe, the sense of a new world and an undiscovered realm in the places by the Gray's Inn Road will never find those secrets elsewhere, not in the heart of Africa, not in the fabled hidden cities of Tibet.¹⁰⁷

By contrasting two textual versions of Gray's Inn Road, referring to a previous incarnation about which Machen once wrote, it is evident that Machen's text resonates at a different frequency to that of Murray's. Machen is often credited as a pre-Debordian psychogeographer; his hyperbolic, ecstatic style, still bearing a trace of the earlier gothic writing with which he is most commonly associated, stands in contrast to Murray's, and indeed that of the Real series, but they share a wariness about literature's ability to 'claim', or represent, space objectively.

Coda

In the context of the late-twentieth century resurgence of psychogeography, the *Real* series'

¹⁰⁷ Machen, *Things Near and Far* (New York: Knopf, 1923), p. 81.

style is somewhat anachronistic. It is closer to a formalised psychogeographical project – such as that of Debord – than the work of contemporary psychogeographers such as Iain Sinclair and Peter Ackroyd, and this more objective approach is reflected by its methodology. As Will Self acknowledges: '[a]lthough we psychogeographers are all disciples of Guy Debord [...] there are still profound differences between us [...] [and] the ways in which we go about the task are various'.¹⁰⁸ Griffiths and Parker, in the relative absence of the kind of original poetry that abounds in the volumes by Finch and Jenkins, create a deeply layered psychogeography that utilises writing from authors as varied as Malcolm Pryce and Bruce Chatwin (both of whom, it could be contended, can be seen to be engaged in their own kind of psychogeographic projects). Conversely, Finch and Jenkins embellish their accounts with their own poetic reflections that engage directly with their prose. Murray's more strictly Debordian project eschews many of these techniques, favouring a more theoretically engaged style; his *Real Bloomsbury* stands out in the series for its deft use of Debordian vocabulary. The series' visual satirising of other contemporary travel guides – brought into the foreground by Parker's intimate knowledge of the inner-workings of both the *Real* Series and the *Rough Guide to Wales* – is often evidenced in the layout of the page. The irreverent use of photography, an ironic paeon to the perfectly framed pictures of monuments and landmarks found in other guides, is often simply of graffiti or signposts. The map, so often a staple of contemporary travel guides, retains nothing more than a spectral presence. The *Real* series is a self-reflective critique of the travel guide genre; it encompasses and celebrates the problems of writing about place, which can be seen as resembling some of those problems of Debordian psychogeography. One of the connotations of the *real*, is that it is somehow intrinsic to its objectivity (it is *more* real than

¹⁰⁸ Self, *Psychogeography*, p. 11.

other travel guides). A safer conclusion would be that, in deliberately foregrounding the 'real', the series is acutely challenging the reader's preconceptions of post-devolution Welsh spaces. Ironically, for a series that reasserts both physical and metaphorical internal borders of Wales, its borderless textuality serves as a resistance to singular categorisations of place.

Conclusion

So, what effect has devolution had upon writing in Wales? Is devolution's effect on literature the result of a continual movement toward independence in Wales, or does this negate the importance of Wales's cultural and geographical diversity? The majority of writing discussed in this thesis appears largely ambivalent toward the process of devolution, yet devolved and devolving geographies have clearly had an impact on the literature that is produced in Wales. The purpose of this thesis has not been to answer these questions unilaterally, but rather to examine different ways in which they might be explored. To return to the research questions that were initially posed in the introduction:

- What effect has devolution had on distinctively 'nationalist' literature and imaginative representations of Welsh geographies?
- How might non-Welsh literary geographies inform an understanding of post-devolution Welsh writing in English?
- How has the newly-autonomous devolved funding model affected post-devolution Welsh writing in English?
- How is devolution reflected directly in the representation of Welsh spaces post-1997? Furthermore, how might devolution be explored and understood as a spatial event?

The first two questions converge in significant ways. In exploring the discourse of Welshness/Cymreictod as an innate (ethnic) and/or elective (cultural) identity in the work of Jan Morris, we can see how the discourse of nationalism has evolved through the late

twentieth century, providing context for changing definitions of Welshness in the context of devolution. In re-assessing the work of Iain Sinclair and the critical response to it, we can see a clear negation of his work's longstanding engagement with Welsh spaces. We might also recognise a tendency to ignore certain Welsh writers (or certain kinds of Welsh writing), who are deemed uncondusive to the nation-building responsibility placed on Welsh writers and emphasised by Gillian Clarke and Nigel Jenkins in the chapter four of this thesis. Such a discussion benefits from an approach to the discourse of devolution that enables a discussion of how writing about non-Welsh spaces can inform an understanding of contemporary Wales. The fervour with which Morris embraces Welsh nationalism (or patriotism) contrasts with the way in which Sinclair removes himself from Wales and Welsh politics, even though both writers have continued to publish non-Welsh texts throughout their career. Just as there are clear elements of colonialism in Morris's work (both textual and subtextual), Sinclair's latent paratextual Welshness problematises previous categorisations of his work as London-centric. The absence of literary criticism that focuses on Morris's problematic portrayal of Welsh ethnic nationalism, and the longstanding lack of discussion of Sinclair's subversive Welsh identity, necessitate a critical discourse that can incorporate both writers into a discussion of post-devolution literary geographies in Wales. This post-devolutionary renegotiation of Sinclair's Welshness might provide a way in which other Welsh 'exiles' might be recontextualised in the light of devolution.

In answering the second two questions, the three chapters comprising Part Two converge on some crucial discussions. For example, through a close reading of the *Real* series and the *New Stories from the Mabinogion*, a clear dialogue emerges between the economics of the literature (its funding) and the infrastructure and landscape of contemporary Wales (the

redevelopment of particular Welsh spaces since devolution). The increasingly significant role of funding bodies such as the Welsh Books Council is one of the ways in which contemporary Welsh politics demonstrates a trend toward creating an environment in which Welsh literature can both be celebrated and used to generate further income (for example, through literary tourism). This analysis attempts to look critically at both rural and urban spaces in Wales, and explores the way in which the meanings generated by these spaces are challenged by post-devolution literature. However, given the proposed cuts to funding for the Welsh Books Council (that were eventually overturned due to popular support), a creative economy such as this is continually susceptible to wider trends of de-funding and budget cuts. The emergence of new funding streams for writers is an important consequence of devolution, and even though public funding for the arts played a key role in Welsh literature prior to devolution, the introduction of the Welsh Assembly has created an environment in which elected political bodies are more accountable to (and potentially scrutinised more closely by) the population of Wales. The Welsh Assembly Government has also demonstrated its ability to directly affect literary production in Wales through the Library of Wales series. Such a political environment has had an effect upon the type of projects that are funded, and by extension those that are not.

Redefining Space

Areas that have undergone redevelopment as a result of Welsh Assembly funding (such as Cardiff Bay, or Aberystwyth Promenade) also bear the hallmarks of such a commitment to the arts, although whether this is born out political expediency or genuine commitment to funding for the arts is moot. However, this new *metaphorical* funding landscape exists

within a contemporary Wales that is continually physically changing as a consequence of devolution. The changing social, interactive spaces of Wales are also being redefined post-devolution. Both the geographical space (Firstspace) and the literature that it generates (Secondspace) are connected by a similar impulse to infuse such places with meaning (the new 'political' south, or the hinterland of West Wales). Devolution has led to some drastically altered geographical locations, as well as affecting the way space is represented and rewritten. As a consequence, the thirdspace of the Welsh locations discussed in this thesis (that which combines the real and imagined), is clearly evolving. The emergence of newly redefined areas (such as the emergence of Aberystwyth as a centre for the production of Welsh/Celtic-noir in *Y Gwyll* and the novels of Malcolm Pryce, and Cardiff Bay as a newly-strengthened, but not unanimously-supported centre of political power) demonstrates the way that such spaces are being reconceptualised, and how this is clearly a product of real and imagined geographies.

New and altered geographies, such as Cardiff Bay, or the All Wales coastal path, provide new sites of interaction for writers, as well as an opportunity to re-define those spaces. In the case of the *Real* series, such a process is territorial (whereas in Morris's work it is described in more colonial terms). Similarly, there are areas access to which is restricted more than previously, changing the way in which space must be navigated, or even closing off routes altogether (such as the new railway embankment in Butetown, Cardiff, noted by Peter Finch in the introduction to this thesis, as well as in his *Real Cardiff* series).

Consequently, devolution can be seen to have had an effect on particular Welsh spaces, which have in turn been written about in both fiction and non-fiction. In Fflur Dafydd's *The*

White Trail, there are instances in which these devolved geographies are rendered not only visible, but feature as a part of the narrative itself (such as someone who works for the Welsh Assembly). The way in which these texts are then read and disseminated affects our understanding of those places. The reason for the *Real* series' initial publication was to provide a creative response to the changing environment of Cardiff Bay. Although it has long since outgrown its beginnings in Cardiff, applying its methodology to several non-Welsh spaces, it is a series directly inspired by devolution, but it does not provide a resounding endorsement of the changes that have occurred in Wales following the referendum. Rather, it is a post-devolution project in the most literal sense, in that it is designed as a response to devolution in Wales. However, devolution is by no means the sole reason for the changing landscape of Cardiff. The development of Cardiff Bay had begun years before the referendum, long before the building of the Senedd and Millennium Centre. With the series' most recent release focusing on London's South Bank, it is clear that the series, like many of the writers discussed in this thesis, continues to have aspirations beyond the borders of Wales.

While psychogeography is a recurrent theme across several chapters of this thesis, there are other themes and locations of particular pertinence. Cardiff Bay is a particularly important area for this discussion, because it is an area that, prior to devolution (and arguably before it, during the private property boom of the 1990s), was replete with meanings with which it is no longer associated. As the old Cardiff Docks, it had a clear industrial purpose, one that is memorialised in Peter Finch's work, but no longer a physical presence. Similarly, contemporary Swansea Bay is memorialised by Nigel Jenkins, and referred to by Sinclair as a 'Ballardian lagoon'. Places that were once significant to Wales's industrialisation have

become centres of bureaucracy and tourism rather than empire and trade. Coal mines have been replaced with rows of conifers, and the geographies to which a previous generation of writers had become accustomed are in a continual process of being redefined.

Devolutionary Style

But this is to say nothing of the idiosyncratic (psychogeographical) style of the *Real* series itself, the purpose of which was (at least partially) to disentangle itself from cultural dilettantism and write Wales from the ground up (rather than taking a singular viewpoint). In the context of post-devolution literature in Wales, the *Real* series is an idiosyncratic outlier. The Library of Wales series provides another way in which to answer this question. It is an outwardly political post-devolution undertaking: 'a Welsh Government project designed to ensure that all of the rich and extensive literature in Wales that has been written in English will now be made available to readers in and beyond Wales'.¹ Whether such a series would have eventually been attempted were it not for the devolved government is moot, but the fact that the *Real* series' publication is the (however indirect) result of an Assembly initiative makes it a political event as well as a literary one. Thus, devolution can be discussed as a context for the literature that has been produced in Wales or written by Welsh or Welsh-identifying authors. It might also be argued that literature published in Wales since devolution (writing that has received money directly or indirectly from the devolved administration), is by its nature political (even if it does not establish any political consensus). Writing can (and does) play a significant role in kindling discussion of contemporary Welsh politics. The words of Gwyneth Lewis that adorn the Wales Millennium

¹ From the 'About Us' section on the Library of Wales website
<<http://thelibraryofwales.com/contact>>

Centre attest to the role of literature in contemporary Welsh politics. Emphasising the closeness of literary figures and political debate in Wales, Mike Parker, another 'elective' Welsh person, (interviewed and discussed during the composition of this thesis), turned his passion for Wales and Welsh culture into a run for political office as a candidate for MP of Ceredigion in the 2015 general election.

Funding

The writers that were selected for discussion in this thesis demonstrate a range of approaches to the exploration of post-devolution Welsh spaces, and negotiate contemporary Welshness from a range of perspectives. However, the representation of Wales and Welshness is not the only factor in their writing, nor is it necessarily the most important. In examining the ways in which Welsh writing in English has been affected by devolution (as well as the way in which literature contributed to the creation of the discourse of devolution), one obvious (and fundamental) answer to consider is that devolution has not had an impact on Anglophone literature in Wales. What we can see in the chapters five and six is a response to Welsh spaces, and new funding paradigms in post-devolution Wales, but if anything the post-devolution writing discussed appears to bear more of Sinclair's cynicism rather than Morris' flag-waving nationalism. In Part One, the emphasis was as much on the way in which devolution has effected the reception of writing, as on the writing itself. There are instances in which the writing is consciously a response to devolution, such as Jan Morris's *Our First Leader* and the poems cited in the introduction by Gwyneth Lewis and Jonathan Edwards. However, these only constitute a small (but nonetheless significant) element of post-devolution and twenty-first-century Welsh writing

in English. We might then distinguish between those direct responses to devolution, and the many references to devolution that are more incidental to the writing. For example, if a character in a novel works in the Welsh Assembly (such as in Fflur Dafydd's *The White Trail*), this may be viewed as no more than a mundane reference to contemporary reality, rather than a comment on sovereignty or the nature of self-government in Wales.

However, the *Real* series and the *New Stories from the Mabinogion* are published by Seren (based in Bridgend, South Wales), a publisher that receives some operating costs from the Welsh Books Council, which in turn receives a stipend from the Welsh Assembly Government. While Wales doesn't yet possess tax-raising powers (thereby closing the loop and making public funding for the arts entirely dependent on taxes raised in Wales), the funding system that has been gradually put in place following devolution places a much larger burden of responsibility on bodies such as the Welsh Books Council, as well as elected Assembly Members, and as the *Real* series proves, such institutions are not above criticism.

We might also see funding connections between the works discussed in Part One and Part Two. As can be seen in Sinclair and Finch's early correspondence, Sinclair's early attempts to obtain funding for his writing in Wales were rebuffed, given that he was a resident in London rather than Wales at the time. While it is now a common occurrence for Welsh writers to obtain funding while living away from Wales (several of the writers of the *New Stories* refer to their distance from Wales when writing their stories), or even having never lived in Wales, Sinclair's situation raises several questions about the potential effect that such a requirement may have had upon Sinclair's Welsh contemporaries. The definition of Welsh writing in English provided by Glyn Jones (also the prevalent definition at the time of

Sinclair's early career), suggests that it was written by 'those Welsh men and women who write in English about Wales'.² The broadening definitions of Welsh writing (and the increasing diversity of its population) are leading to funding for projects that would in all likelihood not have been funded previously. For example, *Fountainville* is a story written by an Indian author (Tishani Doshi) who does not identify as Welsh. The novel is not 'about' Wales and nor is it set within its borders. Such writing requires a less-prescriptive definition of Welsh writing, one that seemingly conflicts with Jan Morris's essentialist definition of Welshness (Cymreictod).

The Gospel of Us and the Future of Devolution and Writing in Wales

While this thesis has attempted to cover a wide range of Anglophone Welsh writing by writers from a variety of backgrounds and generations, it has been, to a certain extent, restricted to a discussion of published literature. There are many benefits to such an approach, and we might witness (hopefully) lines of descendency in Welsh writing published prior to devolution but still driven by connected impulses; whether distinctively utopian as in the work of Jan Morris (and her Welsh-language forebears), or psychogeographical as in Machen, Sinclair, and Finch. The urge to transcribe places, and challenge previous interpretations, is a common thread. Reinterpretations of mythology, such as in the *New Stories*, demonstrate how a collective cultural phenomenon can be retold for new generations of readers and re-set in different and altered geographies (in specific historical co-ordinates). Fundamentally, we might say that such projects exist both within and outside of the new political paradigm in Wales. While the funding of a coastal path, the

² Glyn Jones, *The Dragon Has Two Tongues*, p. 37.

regeneration of a Bay, or the building of a new centre of government, are not the equivalent to the funding of the publication of a book, the newly emerging connection between the voters of Wales and its elected policy-makers (and their decisions) has created a shift from a nation of oft-derided quangos, into a modern, semi-autonomous political space. As such, real and imagined Welsh spaces (and their literary representations) are emerging in several directions.

One such avenue (and one not explored in this thesis), that is particularly resonant with several of the themes discussed, is the newly emerging performance space that post-devolution Wales is fast-becoming. Whether the use of Cardiff (through BBC Wales) as a hub for filming notable recent successes such as *Sherlock* and *Dr Who* (and its *Torchwood* spin-off), there appears to be a surge of interest from major studios in using Welsh locations.³ Perhaps the standout independent series in this regard is *Y Gwyll/Hinterland*, a bilingual detective drama set in Aberystwyth and its environs (published in collaboration between the BBC and S4C).⁴ The series was supported by the Welsh Assembly, its potential economic benefits in Aberystwyth were noted in the media.⁵ Some of the effects have already taken hold: walking tours are conducted throughout its locations in a similar way to the Literature Wales guided walks discussed in the introduction to this thesis.⁶

³ *Sherlock* (BBC Wales; Hartswood Films, 2010-present); *Dr Who* (BBC Wales, 2005); *Torchwood* (BBC Wales, 2006-11).

⁴ *Y Gwyll* (S4C, October 2013-present); *Hinterland* (BBC One Wales, January 2014-present). Produced by Fiction Factory Films. Source for funding information: <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-mid-wales-20820766>>

⁵ The series also received an estimated 15% of its funding through the EU. See <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-28313857>>

⁶ Examples of walks can be seen here: <<http://twmstreks.com/page2.htm>>

The recent Passion of Port Talbot project (spearheaded by Owen Sheers and the actor Michael Sheen), takes the idea of guided walks into the realm of site-specific experimentation. Written by Owen Sheers and published in novel form as *The Gospel of Us*, as well as a feature length film bearing the same title, the Passion of Port Talbot was a multidisciplinary site-specific Easter performance, performed over three days in various locations.⁷ It received funding from both the Welsh Assembly and the EU. It is a secular retelling of the Passion play, with echoes of the *New Stories* (which are intensified by the fact that Sheers authored the play as well as *White Ravens*). It is a multi-disciplinary project, incorporating poetry (the novel begins with a quotation from Sheers's poem 'Shadow Man'), prose (a novelisation was published separately, and transcripts were distributed on the morning of each performance), theatre (produced by the National Theatre of Wales), and film (directed by frequent Sinclair collaborator Dave McKean). The narrative follows a local (fictional) resistance movement, who are opposed to the building of a new bypass through Port Talbot, and a Christ-like figure (played by Sheen), called the 'Teacher'. Enhancing the project's multi-media approach is the interactive map that was produced, detailing the locations of each performance.⁸

The Port Talbot Passion play demonstrates the joint enterprise of various funding models. Like the *Real Series* and the *New Stories* it uses existing talent as well as emerging

⁷ *The Gospel of Us*, dir. Dave McKean (Rondo Media, 2012). Screenplay (and novelisation) written by Owen Sheers (Bridgend: Seren, 2012). The play was produced by the National Theatre of Wales and Wildworks. A website containing material related to the project is available here: <<http://port-talbot.com>> Supported by the Arts Council of Wales.

⁸ An interactive map of the Port Talbot Passion locations is available here: <<http://www.porttalbotmagnet.com/map-of-the-passion-locations/>>. The Roald Dahl Centenary celebrations in Cardiff, 'City of the Unexpected' (17-18 September 2016), took a similar site-specific approach to city-wide performance: <<https://www.cityoftheunexpected.wales>>

performers. It reinterprets mythologies in a local setting for a contemporary audience (again, like the *New Stories*). It focuses its site-specific performance on derelict non-places (such as the building of an overpass), rather than 'tourist' locations (in a similar way to Sinclair and the *Real Series*). And, it demonstrates a resistance to the encroaching forces of globalisation and Anglicisation (found in much of the work discussed above, especially Morris). There are, of course, many other examples of work that is redefining Welsh space, either because or in spite of the increasing powers of the Welsh Assembly. It asserts regional difference in a globalising context, but utilises distinctly modern technologies (such as geo-mapping) in order to generate a narrative out of a specific place.

So, while certain works of literature can be seen to respond directly to devolution, only contextualising these texts as post-devolutionary is insufficient, turning literature into determinist historical data rather than as a dialogic expression of contemporary heterogeneous Welsh spaces. There are very *real* effects of devolution, such as new institutions and the beginnings of political sovereignty, but such themes had been explored in fiction (and even political manifestos) prior to the 1997 referendum. If anything, the aftermath devolution has highlighted the various ways in which Welshness (political, civic, cultural), continues to elude rigid definitions. In focusing attention on the way in which space is constructed socially, a literary geographical reading of post-devolution literature can suggest a way in which a discussion of contemporary Welsh writing might avoid reducing an increasingly diverse body of literature to a series of political ciphers.

The massive upheaval and deliberate rebranding of Cardiff Bay as the centre of Welsh self-government was begun years before the referendum. As the most prominent symbol of

emerging Welsh political space, it began as a profitable business space (attended to by the pre-devolution 'Cardiff Bay Development Corporation' quango). It has consequently become a symbol of the way in which space can be reshaped and redefined, both in a positive sense (of providing Wales with political power), and a distinctly more negative sense (by demeaning and displacing those communities that previously lived there). The literature that Wales will continue to produce throughout the ongoing process of devolution will no doubt be affected by such changes. This literature will also continue to shape the way in which post-devolution Welsh spaces are defined and understood. Anglophone literature in Wales has clearly demonstrated the capacity to incubate ideas about devolution, and ultimately this can have a significant impact. While the psychogeographical cynicism of Sinclair's approach to writing (and to Wales) is a common feature of many the texts discussed in this thesis, there may yet be a place for a return to Morris's nationalism (or something of its kind) in Anglophone Welsh literature.

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